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**FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE:
FACTORS SHAPING THE COLLEGIATE EXPERIENCE**

FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE:
FACTORS SHAPING THE COLLEGIATE EXPERIENCE

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Higher Education Administration

By

Mary Jane Sarador Secuban
University of Arkansas
Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, 1995
University of Arkansas
Master of Science in Health Science, 2001

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University of Arkansas

ABSTRACT

The purpose for conducting this study was to develop an understanding of undergraduate college students' social readiness for the collegiate experience. The study made use of a qualitative approach and a narrative research design that used focus group interviews. The seven focus group interviews were conducted at four sites across the Southern and Midwest United States, including different institutional types. These institutions included a community college, private college, research and comprehensive state university. A total of 21 undergraduate first- and second-year students participated.

The findings included external factors such as parents, siblings, friends and teachers having a significant influence over the students' perceptions of their college experience. Similarly, students in the study found that participation in extracurricular activities in high school helped in their transition to college. However, for first-year students in the study, developing interpersonal relationships in their first year of college was difficult and often marked with disintegrating friendships with roommates. Sophomores in the study found themselves more comfortable in their college surroundings as well as having a solid base of friends. No matter the classification of students in the study or institution type, a connection to family and friends were important in the transition to college.

By having a better understanding of the factors that contribute to the students' collegiate experience based on their expectations and experiences, administrators and faculty alike will be able to better develop policy and initiatives that will contribute to students' eventual success, satisfaction, and graduation from our institutions.

This dissertation is approved for
Recommendation to the
Graduate Council

Dissertation Director:

Dr. Michael T. Miller

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Ketevan Mamiseishvili

Dr. Kristin K. Higgins

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Context of the Problem

For many high school students, the transition to college was a major rite of passage to adulthood (Astin, 1977; Boyer, 1987). Students were faced with a number of challenges and opportunities in the college environment that began to shape their development. Understanding the undergraduate students' college experience has been examined largely in terms of a student's academic preparation (Bowman, 2010; Jamelske, 2009; Kahn & Nauta, 2001; Keup & Barefoot, 2005; Noble, Flynn, Lee, & Hilton, 2007; Starke, Harth, & Sirianni, 2001). However, some studies existed that explored the impact of socialization factors to college (Baker, McNeil, & Siryk, 1985; Mattanah, Ayers, Brand, Brooks, Quimby, & McNary, 2010; Weidman, 1989).

Much of the college impact research focused on specific socialization processes in college, such as student-faculty interactions, peer influences, choice of major, and the college environment (Astin, 1977, 1993; Enochs & Roland, 2006; Jackson, Pancer, Pratt, & Hunsberger, 2000; Keup, 2007; Moffatt, 1991; Renn & Arnold, 2003; Reynolds & Weigand, 2010; Strauss & Volkwein, 2004; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). Further, psychological models focused on student development tended to dominate the area of research on college students (Bowman, 2010; Kerr, Johnson, & Gans, 2004; Lewis, Forsythe, Sweeney, Bartone, Bullis, & Snook, 2005; Magolda, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Pike, 2006). Research related to retention, attrition and persistence of college students, particularly focused on first-year students, were found in surplus within the literature (Barefoot, 2000; Bolle, Wessel, & Mulvihill, 2007; Bowman,

2010; Clark, 2005; Fischer, 2007; Foubert & Grainger, 2006; Hudley, Moschetti, Gonzalez, Cho, Barry, & Kelly, 2009; Keup, 2007; Mattanah, Ayers, & Brand, 2010; Pike, 2006; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). Many of these studies included variables such as satisfaction, success, academic and social integration with college life during the freshman year (Bowman, 2010; Boyer, 1987; Hossler, Kuh, & Olsen, 2001; Jamelske, 2009; Kahn & Nauta, 2001; Keup & Barefoot, 2005; Noble, Flynn, Lee & Hilton, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tsui & Gao, 2006; Starke, Harth, & Sirianni, 2001). Other popular variables identified in the literature included pre-college characteristics of students (academic achievement, grade point average, standardized test scores, race, gender, socioeconomic status), self-efficacy measures, amount of financial resources available to the student, and academic major (Clark, 2005; Larose, Robertson, Roy, & Legault, 1998; Palmer, O'Kane, & Owens, 2009; Pike, 2006; Swenson, Nordstrom, & Hiester, 2008; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005; Veenstra, 2009; Yazedjian, Toews, & Sevin, 2008). It was also widely noted that premature departure from college was associated with economic disadvantages to students as well as their families that also affected persistence (Jamelske, 2009; Kahn & Nauta, 2001; Tinto, 1987, 1993). Similarly, a majority of the studies conducted assessments of students with high attrition possibilities before these students entered college or immediately after the first-semester of the freshman year (Bolle, Wessel, & Mulvihill, 2007; Clark, 2005; Friedlander, Reid, & Shupak, 2007; Gottlieb, Still, & Newby-Clark, 2007; Hudley, Moschetti, Gonzalez, Cho, Barry, & Kelly, 2009; Keup, 2007; Kerr, Johnson, & Gans, 2004; Mattanah, Ayers, & Brand, 2010; Palmer, O'Kane, & Owens, 2009; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005; Zarrett, & Eccles, 2006).

Conversely, a number of studies investigated the gap between the academic preparation of high school students and postsecondary education became the subject of conversation on the local, state and national level (Alexson & Kemnitz, 2004; Clark, 2005; Kirst, 1998; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Larose, Robertson, Roy, & Legault, 1998; Palmer, O’Kane, & Owens, 2009; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005; Veenstra, 2009; Yazedjian, Purswell, Sevin, & Toews, 2007). Additionally, a number of studies covered the expectations and reality of college from students in high school (Holmstrom, Karp, & Gray, 2002; Keup, 2007; Kuh, Gonyea, & Williams, 2005; Pike, 2006; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003; Wolniak & Engberg, 2010).

Few studies have been conducted that specifically examined the relationship of college students’ high school preparation and socialization in college (Baker, McNeil, & Siryk, 1985; Berk & Goebel, 1987; Friedlander, Reid, & Shupak, 2007; Lacy, 1978; Pike, 2006; Swenson, Nordstrom, & Hiester, 2008; Thompson & Joshua-Shearer, 2002).

Socialization to college provided critical insight into the study of college students. In a study by Pike (2006), socialization emerged as an unexpected result of student personality types, choice of academic major, and expectations about college. Weidman (1989) argued that researchers should focus on the socialization of students in college. The intent of the study was to understand students’ high school preparation and its perceived role in socialization to college. By doing so, the study shared valuable insight into understanding students’ college experiences from a sociological perspective.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose for conducting this study was to develop an understanding of undergraduate college students’ social readiness for the collegiate experience.

Specifically, the study explored the role that socialization plays in a student's transition from high school to college. By doing so, the study offered valuable insight into understanding students' college experiences from a sociological perspective in order to aid in developing retention initiatives for undergraduate students in the critical first and second years of college.

Statement of the Research Questions

The study explored undergraduate college students' social readiness for the collegiate experience. The following research questions were answered in the study:

1. What were the perceptions of undergraduate college students regarding how they felt their background characteristics and precollege experiences influenced the social aspects of their collegiate experience?
 - A. From first-year student perspective
 - B. From second-year student perspective
2. What did students perceive to be the impact of their social and academic expectations of college and their actual experiences?
3. How did students' expectations of college social life inform the students' choices, actions and social integration during their first year and second year?
4. How did students negotiate the social transition to their first and second year of college?
5. What were students' perceptions of how internal and external influences shape and/or support their adjustment to the collegiate environment during their first and second year?

Definitions

The definitions below are associated with undergraduate college students and their relationship to the college experience.

1. Socialization: The process where a person acquired the skills and knowledge to make them effective members of society (Weidman, 1989). Socialization involved the impact of the intervention or experience as it relates to college (Pascarella, 2006) and included students' abilities and interests (Berk & Goebel, 1987; Friedlander, Reid, & Shupak, 2007; Lacy, 1978; Pike, 2006; Reason, 2009; Swenson, Nordstrom, & Hiester, 2008; Thompson & Joshua-Shearer, 2002).
2. Success: Success was defined as high school students effectively making the transition to the college student role (Alexson & Kemnitz, 2004; Clark, 2005; Kuh, 1995; Larose, Robertson, Roy, & Legault, 1998; Palmer, O'Kane, & Owens, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005; Veenstra, 2009; Yazedjian, Purswell, Sevin, & Toews, 2007).
3. Expectations: Expectations was defined as the anticipation of future events or conditions that was often linked to how students process information, made decisions and behaved within the college environment (Baker, McNeil, & Siryk, 1985; Holmstrom, Karp, & Gray, 2002; Keup, 2007; Kuh, 1999; Kuh, Gonyea, & Williams, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pike, 2006; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003).
4. Social integration: Social integration was the emergent process that was a function of formal and informal interactions that students had on campus in academic and non-academic settings. These interactions caused students to

evaluate their initial thoughts and goals regarding the college experience (Boyer, 1987; Clark, 2005; Enochs & Roland, 2006; Fischer, 2007; Foubert & Grainger, 2006; Friedlander, Reid, & Shupak, 2007; Hartshorne, 1943; Mattanah, Ayers, Brand, Brooks, Quimby, & McNary, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pike, 2006; Thomas, 2000; Tinto, 1987; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005; Wolniak & Engberg, 2010).

5. Social readiness: Social readiness described how students adjusted to college through meaning-making activities and perspectives (Fischer, 2007; Lewis, Forsythe, Sweeney, Bartone, Bullis, & Snook, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Yazedijian, Purswell, Sevin, & Toews, 2007).
6. Transition: Transition involved the period where students developed the coping skills (positive or negative) in the shift from high school to college. Transition factors included the development of survival skills such as money and time management, self-discipline, responsibility for one's own physical, emotional, financial and academic well-being (Baker, McNeil, & Siryk, 1984; Bolle, Wessel, & Mulvihill, 2007; Bowman, 2010; Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Clark, 2005; Friedlander, Reid, & Shupak, 2007; Gottlieb, Still, & Newby-Clark, 2007; Holmstrom, Karp, & Gray, 2002; Hudley, Moschetti, Gonzalez, Cho, Barry, & Kelly, 2009; Jackson, Pancer, Pratt, & Hunsberger, 2000; Keup, 2007; Kerr, Johnson, & Gans, 2004; Mattanah, Ayers, Brand, Brooks, Quimby, & McNary, 2010; Palmer, O'Kane, & Owens, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Paul & Brier, 2001; Thomas, 2000; Thompson & Joshua-Shearer, 2002; Tinto, 1987;

Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005; Zarrett & Eccles, 2006).

7. Internal influences: Internal influences included any force acting within a student (thoughts, goals, commitments behaviors, attitudes, and experiences) as well as personal attributes and characteristics that influenced students' judgement and subsequent behavior (Clark, 2005; Hudley, Moschetti, Gonzalez, Cho, Barry, & Kelly, 2009; Lewis, Forsythe, Sweeney, Bartone, Bullis, & Snook, 2005; Lounsbury, Huffstetler, & Leong, 2005; Reason, 2009; Strauss & Volkwein, 2004;).
8. External influences: External influences included any outside force acting on a student. External influences included but not limited to peer groups, parents, faculty, staff, employers, family, community members, collegiate environment (Clark, 2005; Dickinson, 1999; Fischer, 2007; Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007; Hudley, Moschetti, Gonzalez, Cho, Barry, & Kelly, 2009; Larose, Robertson, Roy, & Legault, 1998; Paul & Brier, 2001; Renn & Arnold, 2003; Strauss & Volkwein, 2004; Swenson, Nordsrom, & Hiester, 2008; Yazedijian, Purswell, Sevin, & Toews, 2007).
9. Collegiate environment: Collegiate environment referred to the culture that undergraduates found themselves within a university or college (Astin, 1993; Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Enochs & Roland, 2006; Hartshorne, 1943; Jackson, Pancer, Pratt, & Hunsberger, 2000; Keup, 2007; Moffatt, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pascarella, 2006; Renn & Arnold, 2003; Reynolds & Weigand, 2010; Strauss & Volkwein, 2004; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). Collegiate

environment can also be defined as the “social geography and academic geography of the institution” environment (Hudley, Moschetti, Gonzalez, Cho, Barry, & Kelly, 2009, p. 444) or “college milieu” (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tinto, 1993).

Assumptions

The underlying assumption of the study was that students’ social readiness for college was explored. Following were additional assumptions of the study.

1. Students come to college with preconceived notions of the collegiate experience.
2. Students surveyed were representative of the sample being studied.
3. Students’ perception and expectation of their collegiate experience influenced their subsequent behavior.
4. Reliable results were obtained using a focus group approach.
5. Students’ perceptions of internal and external influences shaped their adjustment to the collegiate environment.

Delimitations and Limitations

The delimitations in studying undergraduate college students’ social readiness resulted in significant changes to retention initiatives on college campuses. Delimitations included not being able to generalize cause and effect in regard to social readiness factors to student success in college. However, the study gave administrators insight into developing policy to ensure student success. Following is a list of accepted limitations of the study.

1. The study was limited to first and second year college students in the southern and Midwest United States.

2. The study did not adequately represent all undergraduate college student populations. The socialization process to college differed for specific student populations. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to all college student populations.
3. The study was limited to the institutions and student focus groups directly involved in the study.
4. The study did not extensively examine academic preparation of students.
5. The study was limited to social readiness factors in the collegiate experience.
6. The study did not factor in socioeconomic differences.
7. The study was limited to socialization factors in the college experience and did not specifically address students who withdrew from college or self-efficacy issues.
8. The study was limited to undergraduates according to age, gender, ethnicity, class standing and academic major.
9. The researcher was the only person involved in conducting the focus groups. Findings may have proven to be different if multiple researchers were involved in the data collection.

Significance of Study

Numerous studies over the past 50 years have addressed student access to college (Astin, 1977, 1993, 1998; Kuh, 1999; Pascarella, 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Students were admitted to college by meeting a set of admission criteria; however, once students entered college, they brought with them different experiences, attitudes, and backgrounds that became predictors of their success in college (Alexson &

Kemnitz, 2004; Clark, 2005; Kuh, 1995; Larose, Robertson, Roy, & Legault, 1998; Palmer, O’Kane, & Owens, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005; Veenstra, 2009; Yazedjian, Purswell, Sevin, & Toews, 2007). The college or university’s role was to continually find ways to bring students together to achieve “a quality, value-added learning experience” (Veenstra, 2009, p. 19). Magolda (2009) termed this experience as “meaning-making” (p. 625). Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio (2003) encouraged educators and policy makers to refocus efforts from access to success in college. The authors shared that “true college opportunity includes having a real chance to succeed in college, and it is time to focus policy attention on improving college success rates” (p. 55).

Similarly, the sheer body of research concerning college students occupied the majority of the research in the field of higher education (Astin, 1977, 1993, 1998; Kuh, 1999; Palmer, O’Kane, & Owens, 2009; Pascarella, 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Swenson, Nordsrom, & Hiester, 2008; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005). Pascarella, 2006 shared that the estimate is as large as 6,000 to 7,000 studies on college impact alone. Multiple studies addressed the transition of students from high school to college mostly by their academic preparation (Baker, McNeil, & Siryk, 1984; Palmer, O’Kane, & Owens, 2009; Wolniak & Engberg, 2010). A comprehensive study, entitled *The Bridge Project*, conducted by Stanford University examined the disconnect between postsecondary education and college (Kirst & Venezia, 2004). The project focused mainly on areas of knowledge regarding students’ awareness of course, college entry, and financial aid requirements in addition to emphasizing the need to reform postsecondary and K-12 policies (Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003). Reform was needed to address the

growing disconnectedness between high schools and postsecondary education. If change does not occur, high school students will continue to aspire to higher education and find several barriers along the way.

Socialization to college provided critical insight into the study of college students. Very few studies discussed the transition of students from high school to college qualitatively from the socialization aspect. Studies referred to undergraduate culture in a variety of terms such as the “undergraduate society” (Hartshorne, 1943, p. 321), “sociology of transitions” (Holmstrom, Karp, & Gray, 2002, p. 437), the “college environment” (Enochs & Roland, 2006, p. 63), and the “collegiate experience” (Clark, 2005, p. 296). Even fewer studies have explored the students’ perceptions of how external and internal forces shaped their adjustment to the collegiate environment. According to Yazedijian, Purswell, Sevin, and Toews, (2007), “intuitively [it is] assumed that parents, peers, and the institution play an important role in students’ adjustment to college” (Yazedijian, Purswell, Sevin, & Toews, 2007). Even still, “many studies continue to conceptualize success in college purely in terms of grades and graduation rates” (Yazedijian, Purswell, Sevin, & Toews, 2007, p. 141).

By developing an understanding of undergraduate college students’ social readiness for the collegiate experience, the current study had particular significance to a number of constituents. A number of influences existed that continually act on and around the student. These influences included parents, community members, high school administrators, college faculty, student affairs professionals, state and federal policy makers as well as the college environment itself. The impact of the study had implications for policy and decision-making that affected how high school administrators

prepared students for college as well as how college administrators and faculty assisted students in their transition to the college environment. Faculty and administrators within academic departments were impacted by the results of the study because they had a better understanding of the role social preparedness plays in a students' success inside the classroom. Additionally, parents of college students as well as community members were more knowledgeable in terms of the type of support their students need in this important transition. Finally, state and federal policy makers were more informed as to the best practices for student success and created laws and policy to reflect those best practices. Even though each influence surrounded the student, the college environment tied all of the groups together in a symbiotic relationship. Having a better understanding of how the college environment influenced the student can give us insight into how a student's background characteristics and experience played a role in his or her eventual success.

Through exploring college students' perceptions and expectations regarding their university experience, higher education researchers and policy makers finally have the keys to how to provide the types of support and connections that undergraduates need to be successful in college. By doing so, students should be more successful inside as well as outside the classroom.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

General Introduction

Out of the more than 2.5 million public high school graduates in the United States, 70% will go on to pursue a college education (Kirst & Bracco, 2004; Kirst & Venezia, 2004). Today's students understood the need to attend college because they realized that some form of postsecondary training, preferably a bachelor's degree, is required for a career (Kirst & Bracco, 2004). However, despite students' desire for a college education, many students in their first and second years of college were not returning (Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Lipka, 2006). Research from the U.S. Department of Education shared in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* "has shown that among all students who drop out of college, about two-thirds as many do so in their second year as in their first year" (as cited in Lipka, 2006, p.2). One reason for students not returning may lie in research conducted by Schneider and Stevenson (1999). The authors concluded that most high school students have misaligned ambitions, meaning that they have high ambitions but no clear plan on how to achieve those goals. Similarly, Mortenson (1998) (as cited in Kirst & Venezia, 2004) reported that for the majority of students

the key to graduating is returning after their freshman year, to continue their studies at the college in which they first enrolled. Students who do not continue on to the second year, whatever the reason, will have a more difficult time completing a degree (p. 11).

Successfully graduating students from college not only improved a student's career possibilities, but also contributed to a healthy democracy. The United States previously led the world in the educational attainment of its youth, but recent statistics

have shown that the United States is now behind other countries (Engle & Lynch, 2009). To address the issue, President Obama set a goal for the US to return to its number one position by 2020 by “increasing both college-going and college-completion rates” (Engle & Lynch, 2009, p.2). A number of studies have emphasized the need to address the success of students through academic preparation (e.g. grades and graduation rates) in order to improve the retention, persistence and graduation of students from institutions of higher education (Baker, & Siryk, 1984; Pascarella, 2006; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Yazedijian, Purswell, Sevin, & Toews, 2007). However, recent studies have shown the importance of addressing how nonacademic factors contributed to student success in college (Berk & Goebel, 1987; Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007; Kuh, 1999; Kuh, Gonyea, & Williams, 2005; Lacy, 1978; Pascarella, 2006; Pike, 2006; Reason, 2009; Renn & Arnold, 2003; Swenson, Nordstrom, & Hiester, 2008; Thompson & Joshua-Shearer, 2002). Further, additional research needed to focus on the transition of students from high school to college, especially in the area of socialization (Swenson, Nordstrom, & Hiester, 2008; Pike, 2006; Renn & Arnold, 2003).

Socialization to college provided critical insight into the study of college students. Few studies have discussed the transition of students from high school to college from a socialization aspect. The intent of the study was to understand students’ high school preparation and its perceived role in socialization to college. By doing so, the study offered valuable insight into understanding students’ college experiences from a sociological perspective in order to aid in developing retention initiatives for undergraduate students in the critical first and second years of college.

Description of Materials Location

The research utilized for this literature review was collected using the University of Arkansas' Mullins Library. Electronic resources were collected through the library's database collection located on <http://libinfo.uark.edu/> including ERIC, ProQuest Direct, Ebsco Academic Search Premier, JSTOR, PsychINFO, and Google Scholar. InfoLinks was used extensively to locate book resources that were found by author and/or title. Background information on today's college student was located using The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac. Many of these books addressed the college experience, primarily for undergraduate students. In addition to electronic resources, the Interlibrary loan program was used to locate sources not available at the University of Arkansas. Key words that were useful in the research process included first year college transition, first year college adjustment and preparation, education – demographic aspects, college access and transition, college preparation programs, college student socialization and college preparation, socialization and college students, higher education and social aspects, college freshmen, inequities in college preparation, college student socialization, college student socialization and K-12 preparation, precollege characteristics, college socialization and precollege characteristics, college socialization and high school preparation, college preparation, high school students, socialization, high school seniors, student college relationship, college bound students, college environment, student adjustment, student attitudes.

A number of the resources located included periodicals and peer-reviewed journal articles. Journal articles were found on the electronic journal page of the Mullins' library webpage, located at <http://libinfo.uark.edu/eresources/ejournals/default.asp>. Articles

spanned not only the higher education literature but psychology, sociology, counseling, adolescent research and K-12 education. Additional resources, including books, non-refereed articles, and periodicals, were found within the reference lists of the key journals articles and unpublished dissertations. Making the most of internet websites that focused on K-12 and higher education reform such as Education Trust, The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems and the Stanford Bridge Project were helpful resources in the literature review. Due to the availability of articles electronically as well as resources within Mullins library (including physical resources and personnel), the process for searching for literature for this subject matter proved successful.

Organization of Review of Literature

This review of literature was divided into three major sections. Section one included a discussion on the American college student and the role of cultural norms on college campuses. Section two provided a review of student preparation for college within the context of a student's academic preparation, social readiness and expectations about college. Section three concluded with the student transition from high school to college. The chapter ended with a summary that tied all three aspects of the literature review together.

The American College Student

Today's high school student entering college can be described as

“well networked, more virtually present, and more tolerant of diversity, comfortable with and even dependent on technology, materially satisfied, yet financially conservative, well-educated, informed and environmentally conscious, and more connected to their parents than prior generations” (Grail Research Group, 2010, p. 2).

Introducing members of Generation Z. This generation of students can be defined as “people born between the mid 1990s and 2010. They were also known as Digital Natives” (Grail Research Group, 2010, p. 2). Twenge (2006) labeled these students as iGeneration, iGen, and Generation Me. Irvine (2010) referred to these students as Generation Next, HomeLanders, Generation Net and iGen. Homelanders is a term coined by Neil Howe, the same author that coined the term Millennials. “He is calling them the ‘homelanders’ because they are growing up in a time of ‘greater public urgency and emergency, both at home and around the world’ (Irvine, 2010, p. 2). Many of these children were born to Generation X parents, who are typically older due to the fact that many of them built their careers before starting their families. These same parents were also building smaller families versus past generations. This may be due in part to a world where economic downturns required families to be more fiscally conservative (Grail Research Group, 2010). Because of smaller family size, it may stand to reason that these Gen X parents made more time to connect with their kids, resulting in this generation of students being more connected to their parents. These children were born during a time when subprime lending led to large-scale home and business foreclosures in 2007 and a resulting world-wide financial crisis in 2008. In addition to economic instability, Generation Z children lived in a world of political instability due to the current Afghanistan and Iraqi conflicts (Grail Research Group, 2010). In a more pessimistic view, Twenge (2009) shared that this generation of students are “packaging themselves like products to be sold”, as a result, there was a “relentless rise of narcissism in our culture” (Twenge, 2009, p. 1).

Research that explored how different factors such as parental and peer support, precollege characteristics, involvement in student activities, and other nonacademic factors contribute to a student's socialization to college can be used in concert with academic predictors. By doing so, K-12 and college administrators were able to develop more effective interventions that worked to improve retention and graduation from institutions of higher education (Larose, Robertson, Roy, & Legault, 1998). A student's ultimate success in college did not solely rely on academic success but a combination of variables such as "their capacity to adapt to their new college environment, their personal motivation and involvement regarding learning, and their relationships with their peers and faculty members" (Larose, Robertson, Roy, & Legault, 1998, p. 278). Larose, et. al. (1998) found that few researchers examined the nonintellectual factors that can be used as predictors of college success (p. 276).

Role of Cultural Norms on College Campuses

College is [also] about what goes on outside the classroom, among the students with no adults around. College is about being on your own, about autonomy, about freedom from the authority of adults, however benign in their intentions. And last but far from least, college is about fun, about unique forms of peer-group fun before, in student conceptions, the grayer actualities of adult life in the real world begin to close in on you. (Moffatt, 1991, p. 46)

Campus life in America today is a culture unto itself. Within the microcosm of the communities within colleges and universities existed a culture with its own rules and regulations. When new members are introduced to the environment, cultural norms were introduced in a variety of ways: formal and informal interactions. Formal interactions included new student orientation programs and classroom time with faculty. Informal interactions involved the development of relationships within the student's peer group, whether that be through student activities or athletic activities (Hartshorne, 1943; Kuh,

1995; Moffatt, 1991; Tinto, 1987, 1993; Weidman, 1989). Hartshorne (1943) described the college community as another version of a social community called a social system. This social system included “the informal ‘unofficial culture’ of the students, developed by them in their process of adjusting to the official culture” (p. 321). The other two components of the social system included the training and selection of the personnel on the campus and the “formal organization and material equipment of the college, which may be called its ‘official culture’” (p. 321). Moffatt (1991) wrote about students’ development in an “informal college learning” context that he termed “life experiences” (p. 59). These life experiences were meant to

prepare the students for adulthood in the real world as the students think of it: learning to take responsibility for their own actions in a big institution where nobody monitors them closely. . . .and learning from their successes and failures in college life- from what they sometimes call ‘social learning’ (p. 59).

Similarly, qualitative research conducted by Christie and Dinham (1991) identified significant patterns influencing students’ social integration into college. These patterns included “experiences both within the social environment of the college (institutional experiences) and external to the social context of the institution (external experiences)” (p. 418). Significant institutional experiences stood out: living on campus in the residence halls and involvement in campus activities. Noteworthy external experiences were the students’ interactions with their high school friends and family (p. 422). In that study, external experiences were salient factors influencing students’ daily lives, leading the researchers to suggest the importance of pairing external influences with institutional influences when examining factors of social integration and persistence.

The critical role that campus culture played in the student experience was further validated in a study by Strauss and Volkwein (2004). The researchers investigated

predictors of student institutional commitment at 51 campuses nationwide. The study concluded that the strongest influence on institutional commitment came from the students' own campus experience. Investigators found that students' academic and social experience had five times more significant an influence on a students' overall commitment to the institution than any other variables in the study (including financial aid variables and precollege characteristics of age, gender and ethnicity). Policy implications for higher education administrators included improving the classroom experience through active engagement, addressing advising issues, making faculty more available to students, and facilitating the development of friendships among students through campus and community activities (Strauss & Volkwein, 2004; Thomas, 2000). By doing so, students found their bond to the institution strengthened through the development of social networks, further increased the rates of persistence and graduation from the institution.

Yazedjian, Toews, and Sevin (2008) conducted a student success study to explore how students defined success in college. Of the multiple themes investigated, students cited "a sense of connection to the university and to others" as being important factors to success in college (p. 146). Similar to the research by Moffatt (1991) students in the study shared the "importance of finding a balance between having an active social life while also maintaining reasonable grades" (p. 146), indicating that success in college involved a variety of academic and social factors. Additionally, the researchers found that students in their study wanted to be able to navigate the college environment on their own as another component of feeling successful in college (Yazedjian, Purswell, Sevin, & Toews, 2007).

Student Preparation for College

Academic preparation for college was a necessary component for student success (Baker & Siryk, 1984; Pascarella, 2006; Townsend & Wilson, 2006; Yazedijian, Purswell, Sevin, & Toews, 2007). However, students' social readiness for college as well as the expectations they bring with them about college were equally important factors to consider in the student success discussion.

Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio (2003) found that because of the number of unnecessary barriers that existed among K-12, higher education, popular culture, the media and the community, students received mixed messages about what they need to do to prepare for and, most importantly, succeed in college. Most often, students had a variety of misconceptions about preparing and attending college. These misconceptions included not being able to afford college, meeting the required high school graduation requirements for college, taking easier courses in high school to prepare for college, and being able to take any course they want when they enter college. Additionally, it is clear in their research that students in honors or accelerated programs received detailed information regarding college preparation versus students in non-accelerated programs. However, minority students, first-generation college students as well as students from low socioeconomic backgrounds were often affected by a lack of information about how to prepare for college (Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003; Padgett, Goodman, Johnson, Saichaie, Umbach, & Pascarella, 2010).

The following sections outlined the three most pertinent areas within the literature that cover student preparation for college. These are academic preparation, social readiness and expectations about college.

Academic Preparation

The gap between the academic preparation of high school students and postsecondary education continued to grow. The literature referred to this gap as the expectations gap. The expectations gap was defined as “the standards students are required to meet to earn a high school diploma and the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in their college and career pursuits after high school” (Kraman, Blosveren, Camara, Honigsberg, Muldoon, Palmer, and Gandal, 2008, p. 2). Kirst (1998) identified four critical points that contributed to the widening gap: (a) lack of authentic measures for student assessment regarding college preparation, (b) misalignment between secondary student preparation and college admissions and placement standards, (c) placement of too many students in remedial courses, and (d) low retention and degree completion rates of students in public universities. Secondary and postsecondary institutions needed to find ways to address the expectations gap that exists between high school students and postsecondary institutions. It is essential to address this disconnect for American students to remain competitive in a global economy. The Bridge Project at Stanford University researched the disconnect between secondary and postsecondary education, and its effects on students’ transition from high school to college. Conservative estimates showed that 42% of first-year students in credit-bearing courses entered these classes underprepared. In the meantime, due to a lack of standard assessment tools to measure college preparation, a misalignment between secondary school preparation and college preparation standards, and low retention and degree completion rates in universities, the expectations gap continued to widen. Students were not taking the challenging coursework required to learn the higher level skills such as

critical thinking, evaluating and analyzing. Instead, students focused on remembering and repeating information to their teachers. In order for the U. S. to be successful in a global economy,

We need to encourage children to take more math and science and to make sure those courses are rigorous enough to compete with other nations . . . If we ensure that America's children succeed in life, they will ensure that America succeeds in the world" (Oldham, 2006, p. 1).

Academic preparation for college was often measured through a variety of outcomes, such as level of student motivation, self-efficacy, cumulative grade point average, and scores on national board exams. Many researchers used these measures because they are just that: measurable. For example, academic preparation was measured using a student's cumulative grade point average after the first semester of the freshman year, after the second semester of freshman year or at the end of the sophomore year. Academic achievement was often seen as a logical measure for an outcome versus an indicator of integration into the college environment (Fischer, 2007). In the same study by Fischer (2007), students found ties not only in the social realm of the university but through their connections within the academic environment. Students adjusted to the academic demands of college based on their previous experiences as well as cues received in the current environment. Fischer (2007) found that "students who form connections to professors are likely to be more engaged in their coursework and having this connection to the formal side of academic life serves to further integrate them into the campus environment more generally" (Fischer, 2007, p. 137). Integration into campus life, both academically and socially, has been linked to increased student success and persistence (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005; Veenstra, 2009; Yazedjian, Purswell, Sevin, & Toews, 2007; Yazedjian, Toews, & Sevin, 2008).

Contributing to the problem of students not persisting and graduating from institutions of higher education, high schools were not adequately preparing students for the rigors of college academics. Specifically, Kirst (2001) wrote that the only true K-12 and postsecondary aligned standard is the use of Advanced Placement-

A program that extends from universities, which dictate the course syllabus and exam. An exam score of 3 or higher out of 5 on an AP exam is one indicator of college preparation. But 33% of all AP students do not take the AP exam, which means that many AP students may not be benefiting much from APs close link to postsecondary standards (Kirst, 2001, p. 14)

To exacerbate the problem, many high schools allowed only honors students to take AP courses and as one AP teacher shared during a recent AP teacher workshop, “we encourage other students to go another route” (Alicia Farmer, personal communication, July 28, 2010). This suggested that otherwise qualified students who could take AP courses may not be seen as college ready and encouraged to take non-AP courses, meaning even fewer students taking advantage of this program.

Many high school students understood the importance of attending college but these high aspirations for postsecondary education are marred by intensive remediation and low college graduation rates. No longer was a high school diploma enough to be competitive in the workforce and achieve a middle-class status. Today, students were required to have at least some college (Kirst & Venezia, 2004). The true core of this expectations gap was not realized until students entered postsecondary institutions. “Many are not ready for college-level work, cannot enroll in or complete the program of their choice, and do not graduate from college” (Kirst & Venezia, 2004, p. 8). These problems particularly affected students if they are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or a first-generation students.

Today's generation of students had access to more technology than previous generations but continued to lack the critical thinking, learning, communications, creativity and innovation skills needed to compete with students in other developing countries (Stacy Sells, personal communication, September 29, 2008). Students agreed with this assertion in a study by Thompson & Joshua-Shearer (2002) which found that undergraduate students were asked about their high school education and experiences. These students made a number of recommendations to the public schools to better prepare high school students for college. More than 60 percent of the students cited two main areas: "teach better critical thinking skills and teach better study skills" (p. 7). Half of the students said that "more counseling about college and more writing practice are needed. Better math preparation, permitting all students to take college preparatory courses and increasing parent involvement" were additional suggestions (p. 7).

Students from developing nations were already outperforming American students in international exams, particularly where the focus is on math and science. "These scores are linked to a lack of challenging course work, an ominous sign for many American schools" (Oldham, 2006, p. 4). Only 16% of the undergraduate degrees awarded in the US are in science, technology, engineering and math compared to more than half of those in China. High school students who are not required to take a challenging curriculum, such as four years of mathematics and English, were not adequately prepared for college and the workplace. This problem was exacerbated by the popular view that the senior year is one that is "earned for nonacademic pursuits, including fun, internships, and paid work (Kirst, 2001, p. 10). The other issue was an American educational system that does little to change this ideal. Seniors took the easiest courses to meet graduation

requirements of high schools, and “college admissions decisions do not rely on second-semester grades” (Kirst, 2001, p. 11).

Social Readiness

According to Fischer (2007), “it is clear from the literature [outlined above] that how students adjust to college is crucial to their future success” (p. 130). When students were involved in a variety of campus activities, they not only tend to stay in college but performed better in their classes (Astin, 1977; Boyer, 1987; Fischer, 2007; Pascarella, 2006; Reynolds & Weigand, 2010; Tinto, 1993). A large part of a student’s social readiness for college was a function of a number of characteristics, including family characteristics, socioeconomic status, academic preparation (including high school GPA, availability of AP courses and quality of high school curriculum), social adjustment on and off campus as well as interactions with their peers (Fischer, 2007; Keup, 2007).

A study by Reynolds and Weigand (2010) found a positive relationship between first-semester grade point average and academic resilience. Academic resilience referred to a student’s ability to cope in the college environment. The findings of the study suggested that “the more college students are able to become academically and socially engaged in their college environment, the more likely they are to succeed academically. In other words, when students actively participate in class, interact with their professors, participate in social organizations on campus, or take on leadership roles, their ability to cope with the academic and personal challenges of college increases” (p. 187). This study made a strong case for the level of social readiness that is required for students to successfully navigate the college environment. In the same way, Fischer’s (2007) study found that students who failed to successfully develop formal and informal social ties

with other students on campus “are significantly more likely to leave than are more connected or involved students” (p. 154).

A number of studies focused on the role that peer relationships play in a student’s social adjustment to the college environment (Astin, 1993; Clark, 2005; Dickinson, 1999; Fischer, 2007; Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007; Hudley, Moschetti, Gonzalez, Cho, Barry, & Kelly, 2009; Kuh, 1995; Larose, Robertson, Royle, & Legault, 1998; Swenson, Nordstrom, & Hiester, 2008). Specifically, Paul and Brier (2001) examined the nature of ‘friendsickness’ – “a pressing relational challenge for new college students that is induced by moving away from an established network of friends” (p. 77). This was a challenge because students experienced a major upheaval in their social network when they leave for college, mainly the feeling of having to start over socially and meet new friends. The researchers found that when students are more preoccupied with their precollege friendships, these students have more adjustment issues in college. A study by Swenson, Nordstrom, and Hiester (2008) addressed a similar concept of the role that peer relationships play in a student’s adjustment to college with a slight difference. Although a student’s relationship with their high school best friend was important during the first weeks of college, that relationship needs to no longer be exclusive once the student moves further into the first semester of college (Swenson, Nordstrom, & Hiester, 2008). New friendships needed to be made and developed within the new environment in order for the student to make a successful adjustment to the college environment. The college friendships that developed “suggests that academic and social adjustment and institutional attachment are associated with finding a person who will be loyal and who shares common interests” (p. 563).

The key for administrators in higher education in order to address this issue was to find mechanisms for increasing peer interaction among students. Foubert and Grainger (2006) found a strong relationship in students who were involved in student organizations and an increased growth in their psychosocial development. These psychosocial areas included the ability to establish a purpose, manage their life and participate in cultural activities (p. 180). In comparison, Hudley, Moschetti, Gonzalez, Cho, Barry, and Kelly (2009) conducted a study on college freshmen's perceptions of their high school experience and found that students' peer relationships in high school played a significant role in their social adjustment to college (p. 455). Further, "participating in an academically oriented peer group in high school supported initial academic success for all students, not just first generation students" (Hudley, et. al., 2009, p. 462). Hudley, et. al (2009) shared that administrators should develop policy and procedures that bring new students "together in personalized social interactions as quickly as possible rather than focusing on groups perceived to be 'at risk'" (p. 466-467). Keup (2007) suggested taking it one step further by utilizing the "impact of the community that seems to form naturally around residence halls, courses, and majors" (p. 26). By doing so, students addressed their developmental challenges adjusting to college along with their peers who experienced similar transition issues.

College Expectations

Similar to college students in the early 1990's, students attending college in today's society shared the perception that college is not based on "a never-never land of great men and great books, and so on. They compared it to what they have already known in their young lives to date" (Moffatt, 1991, p. 59). Voices from the media, technology,

the internet and other cultural influences gave students a picture of what college life is like. However, when students attended college, their expectations did not necessarily match up with the reality of their actual college experience (Keup, 2007; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Yazedjian, Purswell, Sevin, & Toews, 2008). Pike (2006) defined expectations as “a method of looking ahead, of anticipating future events or conditions (p. 806). Students’ expectations were very dynamic because as students experienced the actual college environment, they collected information that began to alter their initial expectations. This concept has often been referred to as the freshman myth. The freshman myth was the expectation fulfillment or disillusionment that affected a student’s adjustment to college.

Keup (2007) explored the complexity of students’ expectations about college using the freshman myth as a framework. She interviewed students at different points in their transition to college: during their senior year of high school, at the end of their first semester of college and finally, at the end of their first year of college. She found that not only did students have well-developed expectations about college that included the usual suspects: academic and non-academic experiences. Students also shared their expectations regarding their own personal growth and development as well as developing new college friendships (p. 13).

In terms of developing new college friendships, this study had another interesting finding that involved students’ expectations on the role of their college roommate. Students in her study had an expectation that their roommate would play a more significant role in their social circle and as a means of personal support during the first year. However, the opposite proved to be true. Many students were friends with their

roommates prior to college but the relationship deteriorated during the course of the school year due to unexpected conflicts and disagreements. The students in Keup's (2007) study cited "different levels of cleanliness", "establishing rules about guests and visitors" to more serious issues such as "substance abuse, illness and theft" (p. 20). Following the freshman myth framework, students experienced expectation disillusionment and the roommate situation became one of the most challenging and disappointing issues these students faced during their first year.

In Pike's (2006) sociological approach on college expectations and academic major, he found that a student's individual personality type and major are related to students' expectations about college. Specifically, the student's expectations about college influenced how the student's personality interacted with the immediate environment as well as how the student behaved within the environment. Pike (2006) also found "evidence to suggest that students held expectations that were consistent with their intended majors and at odds with their personality types" (p. 806).

The inconsistency between majors and personality types may be related to findings in a study by Yazedjian, et. al. (2008). This study found that students were aware of the challenging nature of college versus high school but once in college, realized that their "expectations regarding how much work it would take to be successful had to be readjusted once they entered the college environment" (p. 147).

As in the studies mentioned above, students realized that their expectations regarding various facets of college life did not necessarily match their actual experience. As a result, students began to develop strategies to adjust to the new environment. Clark (2005) discussed this idea of strategizing in terms of students facing both the positive and

negative experiences during their first year of college. She identified four broad themes regarding how students employed strategies: “overcoming an obstacle, seizing an opportunity, adapting to change, or pursuing a goal” (p. 302). For example, one student identified herself as being very shy. To address her shyness, the student participated in a training session to become a peer mentor. Another student had deficiencies in his math skills and developed a plan to take his math courses at a different college during the summer as practice. Similarly, Yazedjian, et. al., (2008) found that students who developed strategies such as “attending class regularly, taking classes with friends, sharing class notes, participating in study groups, reading before class, and meeting with professors or teaching assistants” (p. 148) can be invaluable tools to assist in their transition and ultimate success in college.

As the examples above show, it can be assumed that as students began to adjust to the college environment, they became more skilled at defining strategy as well as identified the acceptable and non-acceptable behaviors within their new environment. At the same time, students should feel more confident and begin to explore different opportunities that allowed them to become more engaged in the college atmosphere. Clark (2005) wrote that in some situations, students may not feel they can strategize to improve their situation or standing within the college culture. For example, students continually arriving late to class never think about how to change that issue. Rather, students hold beliefs that do not permit them to change it- “instead, students typically perceived other people’s behavior’s to be part of the unchanging, non-negotiable environment of college” (p. 312). These misguided beliefs held by students gave higher education administrators an insight and opportunity into providing effective intervention

strategies of their own to better assist students in their first few years of college. Clark (2005) suggested using the first-year seminar classes to discuss the rights and responsibilities of students, staff, faculty and administrators within the college environment. These conversations gave students an opportunity to understand they have a voice in the discussion and felt comfortable reaching out to administrators and faculty to voice their opinions and concerns.

Transition from High School to College

According to research conducted by Goldrick-Rab, Carter, and Wagner (2007), higher education had focused much of its research on the transition to college through college participation, high school preparation and the use of financial aid in the enrollment process (p. 2444). However, the literature was scant in the components that made up the transition such as the different pathways and outcomes to college (Goldrick-Rab, Carter, and Wagner (2007). The transition to college was definitely complicated, “beginning with initial entry, and followed by a series of transitions which can include inter-institutional movement, stopout, and changes in enrollment intensity” (p. 2454). The assumption became if higher education was not aware of the components that frame the transition, how could we expect students to move successfully through the institution? Goldrick-Rab, et. al. (2007) proposed that “a full understanding of the process requires an examination from a multidisciplinary perspective” (p. 2470). They found most of the research to be incomplete, specifically related “to the type and quality of empirical testing of theories of this transition” (p. 2470). Most importantly, the main concern seemed to be that higher education researchers failed “to be sufficiently critical of issues such as the attribution of causality” (p. 2471). Higher education should distinguish between the

macro and micro-level issues that formed the postsecondary experience as well as do a better job at tying theory and practice related to retention of students.

Goldrick-Rab, et. al. (2007) discussed the disconnect between K-12 and postsecondary education as part of the transition process as well. The true core of the expectations gap was not realized until students enter postsecondary institutions. “Many are not ready for college-level work, cannot enroll in or complete the program of their choice, and do not graduate from college” (Kirst & Venezia, 2004, p. 8). These problems particularly affected students if they were from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or a first-generation students. Because higher education and K-12 had no accountability measures in place, there was little incentive to work together to bridge the gap. Caught in the middle, students were the ones that suffer. Both secondary and postsecondary institutions should be held accountable for the successful transition of high school students to postsecondary education. Student preparedness was a major issue and one that should be addressed at the K-12 level with the right teachers, the right curriculum, the right collaboration and the right support. K-12 administrators needed to establish and nurture their partnership with postsecondary institutions on programs that bring early college high school programs into their schools to better prepare their students. These two entities should also work harder to jointly drive policy decisions that affect them both. Aligning standards, policies and curriculum were ways to address the expectations gap.

All of these issues confused the entire process for students and their parents because of differing expectations and rules within the two systems. A deeper examination into the “intersection of student choices and structural constraints, and how these interactions shape student success” (p. 2472) needed to take place in order for the facets

of the transition to be more clear. By doing so, more effective strategies that translated into best practices for institutions can be employed to improve the transition process for students.

In a study by Clark (2005), students in her study “perceived social integration as the most prominent challenge in their transitions to college” (p. 297). Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, and Cribbie (2007) wrote that “in the transition to university, students’ academic, social, and emotional adjustment are perhaps the three most important domains to consider” (p. 260). The researchers found that the effects of social support, self-esteem and stress to be major factors in the adjustment of students to college. Higher education can address this issue by facilitating opportunities for peer involvement for students. As a result, students began to develop their own strategies for successfully transitioning to and through college (Clark, 2005; Friedlander, et. al., 2007; Keup, 2007; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2004; Yazedjian, et. al. 2008).

Summary

A student’s ultimate success in college does not solely rely on academic success but a combination of variables such as “their capacity to adapt to their new college environment, their personal motivation and involvement regarding learning, and their relationships with their peers and faculty members” (Larose, Robertson, Roy, & Legault, 1998, p. 278). Larose, et. al. (1998) found that few researchers examined the nonintellectual factors that can be used as predictors of college success (p. 276). Thereby, the current study examined the role that social readiness played in the collegiate experience. By taking into account generational differences of today’s college students, the role that cultural norms played on college campuses as well as student preparation in

the transition to college, higher education administrators should develop a better understanding of the needs of this population of students. Specifically exploring how socialization and social readiness factors played a role in how students transition to college can be the key in helping to develop improved retention initiatives and data-driven policy decisions. By doing so, higher education administrators should see this population of students graduating from our institutions of higher education in greater numbers than ever before.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose for conducting this study was to understand students' high school preparation and its role in their socialization to college. By doing so, the study results offered valuable insight into understanding students' college experiences from a sociological perspective in order to assist administrators in developing retention initiatives for undergraduate students in the critical first and second years of college.

The chapter contains sections on the research design and data collection procedure, setting and participants, researcher bias, data analysis and a chapter summary.

Design and Data Collection Procedure

The study used a qualitative approach using a narrative research design. As described in Creswell (2008), Connelly and Clandinin (1990) described narrative research design as a way to “describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about people’s lives and write narratives of individual experiences” (p. 512) The method of data collection involved focus group sessions utilizing semi-structured, open-ended research questions that the researcher recorded via audiotape and a typed transcription of the sessions. The researcher also journaled immediately following each of the focus group sessions as a reflective exercise to identify themes that occurred throughout the session. Since the researcher was the only data collector for the study, reflective journaling was done in order to triangulate the data collected with the transcripts and demographic data provided by each student. Because the study sought to explore the individual experiences of first and second year students, focus group sessions were the

ideal method of data collection to obtain information on how students are socialized to college. Focus groups were useful in this type of data collection because “focus groups are widely respected for bringing out information that might be missed by a statistical study” and “are useful for learning what participants think in addition to why they think as they do” (Quible, 1998, p. 34). Newton (2000) conducted interviews with millennial students and stated

I tapped into one of the richest sources of information-students’ own stories. Students are excited to talk about their life and very willing to participate in focus groups and seminar discussion . . . They are also curious about their peers. . . (Newton, 2000, p. 9).

Additionally, focus groups were a more effective means of data collection for this particular study versus one-on-one student interviews because of a number of reasons. First, the researcher relied on staff at multiple campuses to find students. Because of this issue, staff could easily gather a group of first- and second-year students for the focus groups versus searching and scheduling individual student interviews. Secondly, one-on-one interviews “are ideal for interviewing participants who are not hesitant to speak, are articulate, and who can share ideas comfortably” (Creswell, 2008, p.226). Because this population of students is limited to traditional-aged first and second year undergraduate students, a group setting such as a focus group was a more conducive method for data collection because a group setting encourages interaction among the interviewees. (Creswell, 2008). The interviews were conducted at four sites across the southern and Midwest United States during the Fall of 2010. The time frame was selected to capture first- and second-year students’ perceptions and expectations of their college experience.

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the first and second year students who participated in the study. These statistics were intended to provide a general context and background of the students who participated in the study. However, because the study was limited to a small sample of institutions and student populations, the statistics were not intended to generalize to the broader population of college students.

The survey instrument involved specific open-ended questions intended to obtain the students' experiences from high school to college specifically related to their social and academic expectations during semi-structured focus group interviews (Appendix A). Participants in the study also completed a short questionnaire that was used to collect demographic and background information to be used following each interview (Appendix B). Permission for the study was approved through the University of Arkansas Human Subjects Review Board (Appendix C).

Setting and Participants

The interviews were conducted at four sites across the southern and Midwest United States and allowed the researcher to collect different student viewpoints on the topic. Students from different institutional types were included from a community college, a private college, a comprehensive state university and a research institution. These institutions were classified by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as being Associate's Public 2 year, Private not-for-profit 2 year; Private not-for-profit 4 year; Baccalaureate Colleges, 4 year; Public 4 year Research, and Public 4 year Comprehensive Research Universities.

The Dean of Students or the Vice-President of Student Affairs office at each institution were contacted to identify students to participate in the study based on certain

criteria, including first-year or second year traditional undergraduate students, moderately involved in campus activities (defined as holding an office in a student organization and/or involved in 2-3 student organizations), unmarried and with no children, and academically eligible to participate in campus student organizations as defined by the Student Activities office of that campus (Appendix D). Since one site was the researcher's home campus, the interviews were conducted on the campus so the researcher sought permission from the Dean of Students office. Following approval, the Dean of Students' office sent a confirmation letter on official university letterhead, confirming participation in the study (Appendix E). A follow-up email was sent to the contact at each institution to verify participation and date of data collection (Appendix F). Students selected were limited to traditional, first- and second-year undergraduate students and did not include international, graduate or non-traditional student populations. Each focus group was limited to 4-6 students in order to obtain detailed experience of each student in relation to their college life.

Researcher Bias

To illustrate how the personal experiences of the researcher played a role in the study, it was necessary to include these factors in the study as researcher bias. As cited in Norum (2000), "Tierney (1998) suggests that how we translate ourselves from researchers to writers will define what we create" (p. 319). In the current qualitative study, researcher bias involved the researcher having fourteen years of full-time professional experience at a four-year public land grant institution. The researcher was heavily involved on campus during her own personal college experience, including serving as a resident assistant, conference assistant, and orientation leader. The researcher

was also heavily involved in Greek life as a sorority member. As a graduate, the researcher served as advisor to the undergraduate sorority chapter. These experiences gave the researcher an opportunity to develop relationships with a number of faculty, staff, and students.

The researcher was very reliant on positive social structures during college so this factor may impact how the data is analyzed. The researcher has two younger sisters who were equally involved in college as well as parents who attended college, so having this background could influence the data analysis. In terms of birth order, the researcher was the oldest child of the three and has always had a high achiever mentality both academically and socially. She graduated from a top high school in central Arkansas with highest honors and attended college on a four-year scholarship. Her senior class attended colleges across the nation so the expectation to attend and graduate college was never called into question. Immediately following college, the researcher attended and completed a graduate degree in health science. Currently, the researcher completed all coursework toward a doctorate in education and passed comprehensive exams for the program. These factors could possibly influence the data analysis for the study.

Currently, the researcher worked primarily with first-year engineering students on transition, socialization, and academic issues. The researcher also worked with second-year engineering students on similar issues. The motivation for the study involved having an interest in working with first- and second-year college students. The researcher has always had a wide range of social support while attending college. Based on these factors, the data analysis could be impacted. Additionally, the researcher needed to

provide a brief explanation to the participants in the study regarding her background so the responses of the participants may be affected.

Data Analysis

Analysis for the data collected included an open discussion of the students' socialization experiences related to college in a focus group atmosphere. Seven focus groups were conducted over the course of two weeks (i.e. approximately four to eight students were selected to participate at each of the four site locations). One focus group of sophomores did not occur due to no students in attendance. The students were selected at each institution by a staff member located within the Dean of Students or Vice President of Student Affairs office. Student selection was limited to first and second year, traditional students living on-campus. Each student was involved in at least one student organization, preferably as an officer. It is important to note that non-traditional and international students were not included as part of this study. The interview protocol involved semi-structured open-end questions that were intended to gauge student responses on their personal, academic and social expectations about college. Each student in the study completed a one-page informational data sheet that included demographic information to be used to provide non-identifiable student background information.

Transcripts, interview notes, and journaling from the focus groups served as the primary data source for the study. Students were informed prior to the interviews that their information would be kept confidential. Additionally, the research questions and the literature on first-and second-year transition, expectations, and socialization issues were used to identify key points, themes, and categories from the student responses. Analyzing the data using themes was supported by Creswell (2008), Specifically, a

thematic approach included extensive discussion about the major themes that arose from analyzing a qualitative database. Often, this approach used extensive quotes and rich details to support the themes (p. 280).

The research questions used in the study identified factors related to how students were socialized to college. Below are the research questions as well as the specific interview questions related to each question as outlined in Appendix A.

1. What were the perceptions of undergraduate college students regarding how they felt their background characteristics and precollege experiences influenced the social aspects of their collegiate experience?
 - a. From first-year student perspective
 - b. From second-year student perspective

Data for this question came from focus group question 1 and 2 (Appendix A). Students were asked about their expectations of their college experience. Students were also asked if their background characteristics (i.e. first-generation status, high school experiences, previous knowledge about college) played a role in their current understanding of the social aspects of college (Baker, McNeil, & Siryk, 1985; Holmstrom, Karp, & Gray, 2002; Keup, 2007; Kuh, 1999; Kuh, Gonyea, & Williams, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pike, 2006; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003). First-year students were included in the study to gauge whether there were different expectations between high school expectations about college and their current experience in college. Second-year students were included to determine if there were differing expectations from their first to second year as well as from high school to their first year of college.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data, including gender, type of high school, type of institution attended, and race.

2. What did students perceive to be the impact of their social and academic expectations of college and their actual experiences?

Data for this question came from focus group questions 1 through 6 (Appendix A).

Detailed experiences were given from a first- and second-year student perspective. First-year students were included in the study to gauge whether there were different expectations between high school expectations about college and their current experience in college. Second-year students were included to determine if there were differing expectations from their first to second year as well as from high school to their first year of college. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data, including gender, type of high school, type of institution attended, and race.

3. How did students' expectations of college social life inform the students' choices, actions and social integration during their first year and second year?

Data for this question came from focus group question 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, and 9 (Appendix A).

To answer this question, students were asked how their expectations informed their decision to get involved or not get involved during their first and second year of college (Boyer, 1987; Clark, 2005; Enochs & Roland, 2006; Fischer, 2007; Foubert & Grainger, 2006; Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007; Hartshorne, 1943; Mattanah, Ayers, Brand, Brooks, Quimby, & McNary, 2010; Thomas, 2000; Pike, 2006; Gardner & Upcraft, 1989; Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005; Wolniak & Engberg, 2010). Based on student responses, the researcher divided the responses into social expectations regarding college and each student's specific experiences about college. Detailed

experiences were given from a first- and second-year student perspective. First-year students were included in the study to gauge whether there were different expectations between high school expectations about college and their current experience in college. Second-year students were included to determine if there were differing expectations from their first to second year as well as from high school to their first year of college. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data, including gender, type of high school, type of institution attended, and race.

4. How did students negotiate the social transition to their first and second year of college?

Data for this question came from focus group questions 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. (Appendix A). Based on student responses, the researcher divided the responses into social transition experiences regarding college and each student's specific experiences about college (Baker, McNeil, & Siryk, 1985; Bolle, Wessel, & Mulvihill, 2007; Bowman, 2010; Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Clark, 2005; Friedlander, Reid, Shupak & Cribbie, 2007; Gottlieb, Still, & Newby-Clark, 2007; Holmstrom, Karp, & Gray, 2002). Detailed experiences were given from a first- and second-year student perspective. First-year students were included in the study to gauge whether there were different expectations between high school expectations about college and their current experience in college. Second-year students were included to determine if there were differing expectations from their first to second year as well as from high school to their first year of college. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data, including gender, type of high school, type of institution attended, and race.

5. What were students' perceptions of how internal and external influences shaped and/or supported their adjustment to the collegiate environment during their first and second year?

Data for this question came from focus group questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9 (Appendix A). Based on student responses, the researcher divided the responses into external and internal influences impacting each student's specific experiences about college. Detailed experiences were given from a first and second year student perspective. First-year students were included in the study to gauge whether there were different expectations between high school expectations about college and their current experience in college. Second-year students were included to determine if there were differing expectations from their first to second year as well as from high school to their first year of college. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data, including gender, type of high school, type of institution attended, and race.

Chapter Summary

The current chapter provided a summary of the research methods, data collection and analysis used in the research study. The sample consisted of undergraduate first- and second-year students at four colleges and universities. The researcher conducted focus groups using semi-structured open-ended questions. The set of guided questions were utilized during each focus group session. The researcher collected data using audio taping and note-taking during each session. A written transcript of each session was produced. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and a thematic approach as described in Creswell (2008). A thematic approach involved identifying themes in the responses provided by the participants in the study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter included a summary of the study, data collection process, results of the study, findings of the study and a chapter summary. The summary of the study contained information on the importance of the study and the process for data collection. The data collection section described the method and specific procedures for collecting the data. Each of the five research questions were answered with the supporting data for each of the answers. Finally, a chapter summary concluded the chapter.

Summary of the Study

The purpose for conducting this study was to develop an understanding of undergraduate college students' social readiness for the collegiate experience. The current study explored the role that socialization played in a student's transition from high school to college. By doing so, the study offered valuable insight into understanding students' college experiences from a sociological perspective in order to aid in developing retention initiatives for undergraduate students in the critical first and second years of college.

There were few studies conducted that have specifically examined the relationship of college students' high school preparation and socialization in college (Baker, McNeil, & Siryk, 1984; Berk & Goebel, 1987; Friedlander, Reid, Shupak, & Cribbie, 2007; Swenson, Nordstrom, & Hiester, 2008; Pike, 2006; Thompson & Joshua-Shearer, 2002). Socialization to college provided critical insight into the study of college students. The intent of the study was to understand students' high school preparation and its perceived

role in socialization to college. By doing so, the study shared valuable insight into understanding students' college experiences from a sociological perspective and contributed to the literature on retention of first- and second-year undergraduate college students.

Data Collection Results

A total of seven focus group sessions were conducted at four sites across the southern and Midwest United States during October and November 2010. The time frame was selected to capture first- and second-year students' perceptions and expectations of their college experience. First- and second-year students from different institutional types, specifically a community college, private college, a comprehensive state university and a public research institution, were included as part of the study. These institutions were classified in the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as being: one private two-year not-for-profit associates granting institution; one private not-for-profit 4 year or above, baccalaureate colleges with diverse fields; one public 4 year or above comprehensive doctoral granting with very high research activity; and one public 4 year or above postbaccalaureate comprehensive master's colleges and universities.

The Dean of Students or the Vice-President of Student Affairs office at each institution was contacted by telephone to identify students to participate in the study based on certain criteria, including first-year or second-year traditional undergraduate students, moderately involved in campus activities, unmarried, and academically eligible to participate in campus student organizations as defined by the Student Activities office of that campus. Students selected were limited to traditional, first- and second-year

undergraduate students and did not include international, graduate or non-traditional student populations.

Following the initial telephone call, the researcher submitted a follow-up email to the contact at each institution to verify participation and date of data collection (Appendix D). Each institutional contact identified the students to participate in the study, scheduled the day and time for the focus groups, and explained to their students the need for their participation in the study (Appendix F). Many of the students were identified through academic classes, residence halls, and student activities offices. The first focus group took place at the researcher's home institution (case study institution #1) during October 2010. For the first-year student focus group session, two students participated for a total of 10 minutes. The second-year focus group consisted of five students and lasted 29 minutes (see Table 1). Case study institution #1 had a total enrollment of 21,405 students. The total undergraduate enrollment was 17,247 as of Fall 2010.

The second focus group session took place at case study institution #2 and involved a private, two-year community college located in the MidWest United States. The focus group was conducted in October 2010 and involved three first-year students and three second-year students. The first-year focus group lasted a total of 25 minutes and the second-year focus group lasted for 38 minutes (see Table 2). Case Study Institution #2 consisted of a total enrollment of 350 undergraduate female students.

The third focus group session occurred at case study institution #3 and took place at a research institution located in the MidWest United States in November 2010. The first-year student session involved two students and lasted for 20 minutes. The second-

year student session involved two students and lasted 22 minutes (see Table 3). The latest enrollment numbers for case study institution #3 included a total enrollment of 7,277 for Fall 2009. The total undergraduate enrollment was 5,934.

The final focus group session took place at case study institution #4 and occurred at a private, four-year institution located in the Southern United States. The first-year student session included five students and lasted 45 minutes. The second-year student session did not take place due to having no students available to attend the session (see Table 4). The total enrollment for case study institution #4 was 2,000 students, including 1,200 undergraduate students.

Table 1.

Focus group participants from Research University- Case Study Institution #1

Assigned Name	Reference number	Gender	Ethnicity	Classification
Colleen ^a	1	Female	African American	1 st year
Andy ^b	2	Male	Multi-Racial	1 st year
James	13	Male	African American	2 nd year
Jonah	14	Male	African American	2 nd year
Justin	15	Male	African American	2 nd year
Mary Alice	16	Female	Native American	2 nd year

^a Names are pseudonyms selected by the researcher

^b Andy reported he was Latino and Caucasian

Table 2.

Focus group participants from Community College- Case Study Institution #2

Assigned Name	Reference number	Gender	Ethnicity	Classification
Peggy	3	Female	Caucasian	1st year
Joy	4	Female	Caucasian	1st year
Marsha	5	Female	Caucasian	1st year
Sharron	17	Female	Caucasian	1st year
Barbara	18	Female	Caucasian	1st year
Kathy	19	Female	Caucasian	1st year

Table 3.

Focus group participants from Comprehensive Institution: Case Study Institution #3

Assigned Name	Reference number	Gender	Ethnicity	Classification
Becky	6	Female	Caucasian	1st year
Susan	7	Female	Caucasian	1st year
Steven	20	Male	Caucasian	2 nd year
Sherry	21	Female	Caucasian	2 nd year

Table 4.

Focus group participants from Private College: Case Study Institution #4

Assigned Name	Reference number	Gender	Ethnicity	Classification
Stephanie	8	Female	Caucasian	1st year
Jojo	9	Female	Caucasian	1st year
Nita	10	Female	Caucasian	1st year
Olivia	11	Female	Caucasian	1st year
Sylvia	12	Female	Caucasian	1st year

At the beginning of each focus group meeting, the researcher explained the details of the study to each group as outlined in the informed consent form (Appendix G). The researcher also reminded the participants that the focus group meeting would be audio recorded strictly for the purposes of the research project. Each participant was given an informed consent form to sign for research purposes that was returned to the researcher (Appendix G). Each participant was also given a copy of the informed consent form for their own information. Additionally, each participant completed the demographic information form as part of the study (Appendix B). Participants were also provided snacks during the focus group sessions. Each focus group interview was recorded through the use of a digital audio device. Following each focus group session, the researcher transcribed each interview to be used in the data analysis.

Verification of Data

Intent

During the focus group interviews, the researcher made detailed notes through an electronic field journal that included identifiable themes that arose during each focus group session. Field notes included an in-depth analysis guided by the research questions. The researcher intended to identify relationships in the themes that developed during the focus groups, taking into account verbal and non-verbal nuances of the participants. To do this, the researcher journaled her impressions and content during the sessions. For example, if a participant cried or found a particular subject difficult to discuss, the researcher documented these findings in the field notes. By doing so, the nuances in the conversation helped to strengthen the identification of certain themes throughout the data analysis.

During the focus group sessions

At the beginning of each focus group session, the researcher introduced herself and welcomed the students participating in the study. The participants were also offered snacks as part of their participation in the study. The researcher then distributed the two copies of the informed consent forms to each participant and proceeded to describe the purpose of the study. Students then signed the informed consent. At this point, the researcher reminded the students of the recording portion of the study. Depending on the location of the session, students needed to speak louder than normal because of outside conversations. As the session continued, the researcher made notes in the electronic journal to help trigger themes that occurred during each session. These themes were marked by an asterisk or angled parentheses in the journal and were later used in the data

analysis from the transcriptions. For example, during one session, the participant expressed sadness when discussing leaving her sister after visiting home for a weekend.

I was driving out of my sister's parking lot and I was like crying all the way back from Tulsa <crying>. Don't go home too much. It's still hard thinking about it and I cry a lot about everything. I'm happy I'm sad I'm excited.

At the end of the sessions, the researcher thanked each of the students for their participation and gave the students an opportunity to ask additional questions or concerns that they may have had during the session. Immediately after the students left, the researcher identified her general impressions and trends that were discovered during each session. These notes were made in the electronic field journal and written in short hand.

An example included the following:

Closest friends, etc . .life lessons . . . in college, have to experience it, because you go through so much with others going through the same thing. . .college is your introduction to the rest of your life. To the real world, relationships, money, paying bills, responsibilities. . .get introduced to it all at on, drown or swim here and hope you can keep going . love every minute of it and would continue to do it. What a real friend is or not= first few months of being in college, sophomore year: first real friends are, stayed in his dorm, DC: first semester, people who like to party. Evaluation, then the cut. MU: didn't want to hang out with HS friends, summer before college year, was out and about. Trying to get back to college but didn't want to get bak. Felt suffocated. Invest so much of your life, want to continue. Going back home: same rules, but at home couldn't just leave . . .in college just leave.

After the focus group sessions

In order to maintain the integrity of the sessions, the researcher transcribed the interviews within a day of each session. This was also done to compare the electronic field notes to the transcription. Most importantly, identifying themes was easier to do following each session.

Findings of the Study

Research Question 1

1. What were the perceptions of undergraduate college students regarding how they felt their background characteristics and precollege experiences influenced the social aspects of their collegiate experience?
 - a. From first-year student perspective
 - b. From second-year student perspective

Answer to Research Question 1

First-year student perspective

In terms of the experiences of first-year students, a number of factors played a role in their perceptions of their collegiate experience. Specifically, precollege experiences that included attending summer programs through local colleges and universities were beneficial to these students. By taking advantage of these opportunities, students were able to not only gain college academic credit but were given a chance to live independently from their parents. Consequently, the students were able to build relationships with college faculty and staff so by the time these students arrived on campus as first-year students, interactions with faculty and staff came more naturally to them. Peggy commented

When I was in high school, I did a lot of summer programs. So my freshman year of high school, I went to an explorer college program at the college my dad taught at and that was a two week program to earn college credit and like get the college experience. And then my sophomore year, I went to Concordia language villages which is a summer program for a month to get college credit and it's like a Spanish immersion program since Spanish is something I'm interested in. That was a good experience. And then I also went, the following summer for high school I went for college credit and got college credit for Spanish. And then just extracurricular activities that were beneficial and leadership activities.

Not surprisingly, AP and honors courses played a role in helping these students become acclimated to the college campus. For many students like Colleen, the rigor of AP and honors courses “really helped to mature me and get me ready for college.” Similarly, taking college courses at local community colleges helped to prepare these students academically for the rigor of college academic life. For instance, Colleen also said “I also took concurrent courses in a community college in my town. It was mainly independent [*work*] so I was kind of already used to college work and how the process went.” Nita had a similar experience

For me the blend of high school and extracurricular activities, like yearbook, leadership like NHS (National Honor Society) along with the faculty at my school was phenomenal. They really invested in their students. Several of them, I still keep in touch with. They have been really helpful. Along with the dynamic of my family, just the family, school, church helped me. They all worked together to prepare me.

Despite the academic preparation that AP and honors classes provided these students, there still seemed to be a sense that there would be more independence in college than they were accustomed to having in high school. For example, Colleen explained

The concurrent credit at the college helped me to realize it’s not like high school. It’s more independent. You have to do everything on your own. The teachers won’t be there to say it’s time to turn in your homework or remember you have to study for this. You have to do it all on your own and make yourself remember to do it because nobody will be there to do it for you.

Parental support and expectations was a major theme that was identified through the focus groups for first-year students. Many of these students had parents who attended college and received multiple degrees. Because of this perceived pressure, these students

felt a need to succeed and not fail their parents by doing poorly in college classes. In

Andy's case

They [*his parents*] pressured me a little too much to do well and really have to do this. With all my family with all their high degrees, I really have to, oh man, I really have to do something. Don't get me wrong. I really want to do something but even more pressure that if I fail, I'll be a big failure in my family.

Also, students began to notice a change in their relationship with their parents during the transition from high school to college. Jojo illustrated

Aside from classes, my parents did a good job of preparing me for college life. With the fact that they did a good job letting me take on more responsibility and make my own decisions. Like the transition between being my parents to being more like my advisors and mentors. I love them and miss them. They did a really good job of that.

In the same way, pressure from siblings who were currently in college or had already completed college created additional expectations for these students. Andy stated "I have three older siblings who have already been to college. They've given me tips before but it's definitely more independent than I thought . . . it's hard to get motivated to do things."

Second-year student perspective

Second-year students had similar perceptions regarding their preparation for college. These experiences ranged from changing family dynamics to academic preparation. However, different than the first-year students, the second-year students mentioned financial support, international experiences, and career expectations as influential factors affecting their college experience.

In terms of international experience, a number of second-year students had study abroad opportunities while in high school. For Barbara

I was an exchange student in Chile for a summer so that was the first time I had a roommate, that was the first time that I had to really be away from home. I think if people go out and get away from home just for a short period of time during high school, it makes it a bit easier to go off to college.

Kathy had a similar experience

I did a mission trip in Guatemala and also working at a summer camp one summer. Stuff like that that kind of forces you to get out of your home, away from your parents. [*Your parents*] can't be there to be like, 'This person is being mean to my daughter. You need to do something about it to your higher ups'. You kind of have to fend for yourself. And so that prepared me too.

As far as academic preparation, the second-year students reiterated the importance of taking Advanced Placement (AP) and honors classes in high school as essential preparation for college. Barbara articulated that "I think taking the harder classes in high school because it's really different here and it prepared me for college." Taking difficult courses in high school not only prepared the students academically for college, it also helped ease the transition to a completely new environment. Peggy said "I'd say [*Advanced Placement courses*] made the transition easier and a lot more comfortable in new environments. They taught me really good study ethics and time management."

Financial support through scholarships and supportive counselors were cited as important factors influencing the college experience. For Sherry

While I was in high school, I took really, really difficult classes. At least the hardest I could take at my high school, like AP programs and really utilized the counselors there to help figure out what high school classes to take to get a good scholarship for any college I applied to.

Sherry also mentioned that financial support was crucial to her even considering college as well as a motivator to stay in college

Well if I didn't have my scholarship, I probably wouldn't be going to college so I have to maintain like a 3.5 GPA to stay in the honors college. And to do that, I just try to prioritize study time and make sure that, you know, even though I love

to work out or something like studying always comes first so just gotta get the homework done is all I have to say.

Career aspirations were often tied to parental expectations for some of these second-year students. Steven not only identified financial support as being important but also shared about parental pressures on his career choice

I've always wanted to be a doctor. Like I have pressure behind me from my parents and everybody to do it as well. It's something that motivates me every day to go to class and everything like that. And the fact that I have scholarships, at least my tuition is paid for too.

Finally, for many of the second-year students, having siblings that were currently in college or finished with college helped them have an understanding of college life while they were still in high school. Specifically, for Justin

While I was in high school, my sister was in college so I took certain weekends and I would go to her college and visit with her on the weekends and have somewhat of a college experience. There was a week like we had teacher work days or something and I would go to school with her and sit in her classroom with her so I actually had like a college experience. I would take notes with her and we would exchange notes and stuff like that. That was while I was still in high school. So that's what I did.

For others, not having siblings did not discourage them from finding ways to experiencing college while in high school. For both James and Mary Alice, having an opportunity to attend an on-campus summer precollege program specifically for engineering students was a unique opportunity

The summer before freshman year, me and James came here for 3 weeks and we all lived on campus and that was the first real college experience where we got to live on our own, away in the dorms. So that was one of the first real college experiences [*for me*].

Finally, Jonah disclosed that "I'm just gonna tell ya'll the truth. What made me [*want to attend college*] and like it was the fact that I knew there was going to be a lot of girls."

Conclusion for Question 1

Both first and second year students that participated in the study agreed that a number of background characteristics and precollege experiences influenced the social aspects of their collegiate experience. A number of precollege experiences, that included everything from summer programs, study abroad programs to concurrent enrollment in college classes to AP and honors courses, were cited as important experiences that prepared these students for their current college experience. For many of the students in the study, a blend between academic and extracurricular activities was important to having a balanced understanding of college life while still in high school.

The people in their lives had the biggest influence on the students' experiences and expectations for college. Having family members that had previously attended college (whether that be parents and/or siblings) were significant influences on the students' college experience and expectations. For other students, having supportive teachers, counselors, non-related adult figures, professors, and church members was critical to their collegiate experience. For example, Susan had a mother who had not been as supportive of her in high school or college. She commented

And so I have somebody else who is in my life who is like my mother who has filled that mother-figure but if my mother was more supportive of my decisions and what I want to do. Like showed that she cared more.

For all the students in the study, parental pressure seemed to resonate the loudest. There was a common desire to ensure that, no matter what, parental expectations weighed heavily in the students' decision-making process while in college. Susan explained

I have raised myself since I was 12 so I'm pretty independent. In college, there's a lot of things you could fall into, like drugs, you could fall into drinking, not going to class. Like there's a lot of bad decisions you could make and being independent

and having raised myself and having known for myself what is best, I'm not going to fall into any negative activity.

Becky talked about the parental pressure regarding success in college as something that she has known for her entire life

Definitely, I had parents who went to grad school, so basically expected that I would be going to college by the time I was born. They prepared me my entire life for going to college.

Still another student had the additional pressure of not only having a parent that attended grad school but was also a college professor. Peggy affirmed

I mean also I didn't mention that my dad was a college professor for a really long time so I kind of grew up on a college campus. So like the idea of going to college was exciting. When I was 5, I told my parents that I was going to get my PhD someday. So that kind of helped but then like once I got here I had that mentality that I was going to engage in it and do well so I mean from the moment I got on campus, even before, I had already emailed professors and said like is this the class that I should take and I had already talked to my academic advisor so I had already engaged in the campus which really helped when I got on campus to be really involved and develop my identity on campus as a student. And then like opportunities are easier to find when you have connections with faculty and stuff. That was something that I expected to be true and is true and is very true [*here*]. They really emphasize the small classes and relationships that you build with professors and they're there for you.

Research Question 2

2. What did students perceive to be the impact of their social and academic expectations of college and their actual experiences?

Answer to Research Question 2

Social expectations

The common theme that arose across all institutional types for all first-year students in the study was that all of them found it very difficult to adjust to college from a social standpoint. The first-year students were accustomed to the established friendships

they had developed in high school and attending college meant having to create new friendships. For these students, the process of having to recreate new friendships caused anxiety and stress because it caused these very social students to feel truly alone for possibly the first time in their lives. Consider Jojo's feelings when she first arrived on campus

When I first got here, I struggled. Like sometimes I still struggle, not with the people, the people here are great but you put little insecure Jojo in a position where your parents are gone, and all your best friends are gone and you're making new friends and this is like one of the hardest times in my life to be away from home and not really have anybody. Like you can't go up to anybody and be like, "hi my name is Jojo and I'm having a really hard time". You have to be strong, and like make a good name for yourself right off the bat even when you're feeling so alone and really confused. So my friends from far off really helped to encourage me that it takes time to really build things and to not give up. Like there are many times when I'm like mom and dad, can I really just go home please? And they would just encouraged me to stay her and God has me here for a reason and I just need to figure out what that is and bless other people in the process. So just really with their encouragement and support because I really had a hard time in transitioning and everything. But not one of them told me to leave. Everyone told me to stick it out and tough it out so it will be interesting.

For Susan, the adjustment to the collegiate social environment was just as difficult

. . . creating best friends here was one of the hardest things I've had to deal with because nobody from my high school [*came to school here*]. I was like a girl that came here and so I was like on my own and I had to make friends and that was really hard. That was one of the things that was really hard to do was having best friends that you could trust. Just having people you could trust. In high school you've known each other your entire life.

The adjustment to the social environment in college not only entails meeting new friends but also not having to worry about pre-established stereotypes as it was in high school.

And in high school, you were always that person. You come to college and you start all over. People don't know you. You create your own identity rather than being stereotyped or like known as that person who is funny or that person who is athletic or the person who is really smart.

However, overcoming the social anxiety to meet new people is definitely an achievable goal because many of these students, despite the struggles at the beginning of the year, found a core group of friends in their first semester of college.

. . .I think even now it's still really hard. And we've been here for almost a semester. Like I still call my best friend almost every day. We spend hours on the phone kind of stuff. But I do agree with you that once you kind of find your group, then it's a lot easier to deal with but it's still tough because you still miss the people who have been there your entire life.

In terms of leadership opportunities available on campus, all of the students in the study found that by being involved in student organizations gave them an opportunity not only to network with other students but created a balance between their academic responsibilities. An interesting observation made by Peggy and others at institutions with less than 10,000 students in the study was the comparison of their school to "larger schools" and the perception that students at larger schools "spend a lot more time partying or doing things that are not their purpose of being at college."

Involvement is definitely a huge part of like the college experience and getting the academic side of it. A lot of people like that go to, like all of my friends who go to larger schools spend a lot more time partying or doing things that are not their purpose of being at college. Why would you pay this much money to go to a college if you're just going to go party? I mean there's nothing wrong with taking breaks and having fun with your friends. I'm not saying that but they just have to find a balance between like studying and taking advantage of the opportunities on campus. I mean with our campus, we are really small, so the opportunities are pretty much endless. Like it's really, you have to learn to say no here. Otherwise you can be involved in things and you never sleep. Like you go around the clock just busy, busy, busy but I mean engaging in things also has a benefit. I mean I just got offered a trip to go to New York for almost a week for this conference and that's something that most first year students are not offered so going to a school that really emphasizes the opportunities for every level is interesting. I mean I was the only freshman there at the conference out of 160 people so that was kind of a cool thing but definitely like if I hadn't been an involved student or I hadn't done the work then I probably would not have been

selected to go. I mean like it really does have benefits to being involved and it means that I want to stay in college so I don't know.

In the same way, Sherry found herself even more involved as a sophomore than she was during her first year of college but unlike many of the first year students, she realized that finding activities that made her happy was a priority for her second year in order to maintain a balance

I think that during my second year I've gotten way more involved. . . That I've gotten into several campus organizations, like the student ambassadors, student government, and stuff like that. But I think that anyone should know that college is really somewhere where you have to get involved but you have to maintain a sense of self and you have to keep doing the things that make you happy, whether that's working out or reading a book you know 30 minutes a day. Those things are very important to keeping you level headed. So just because you're trying to be a successful achiever, you have to keep sight of the things that make you happy.

In terms of their interactions with their parents, many students observed that this particular relationship changed when they went to college. For first-year students, parents were perceived to be more involved in their lives during their first year and stayed in contact with them frequently. For example, Colleen reported

Well, my family called me everyday non-stop, from 5 o'clock in the morning until 10 o'clock at night. I know I used to ignore their phone calls, they would call so much. But they would always be like, make sure you do your homework, make sure you study, make sure you do this, make sure you do that, if you need help, make sure you go find tutoring. I mean they were always drilling me on the things that I needed to do. I mean, they were my motivation mainly.

Nita had a similar experience with her parents but wanted to emphasize that even though her mom called her all the time, she did not want to consider it a problem or a lack of care on her part for her mom

I guess for me, as much as I like talking to my parents, my mom would leave me like 5 messages a day the first few weeks. That was probably a little much and they were all the same "hey this is mom give me a call". Just knowing the line there too I guess. Not in a bad way though! I like talking to them.

By the sophomore year, the students in the study realized the changing nature of the relationship with their parents. Specifically, their parents were not in contact as much as they were during the students' first year but as sophomores, the students gained a greater appreciation and respect for their parents. For Mary Alice

My parents called me everyday freshman year and even though I got annoyed with it, I am really grateful that they did it now. Now they will call me once or twice a week and I kind of miss talking to my parents because I don't see them every day. And so that really helped even though I didn't like it at the time. Then knowing they were there to support me and just talking to them about everything I was going through really helped.

Academic expectations

Students' perception of the academic expectations required for success in college varied across institutional type for students in the study. For example, students at the four-year research institution felt their academic preparation in high school prepared them for college but still found that they needed to make adjustments in their study habits while in college. For students at the four-year comprehensive and the four-year private institutions, taking a difficult high school curriculum prepared them for college but the transition to the college course load was "a pretty smooth transition." Sherry attended the comprehensive four-year institution and shared that "college hasn't really felt like college to me. It's not any harder than high school." For first-year students at the private four-year institution, high school honors classes were critical in preparing her for college because as Nita stated, "I feel like a lot of my classes [*in college*] are easier or at the same level as my high school classes. . . .having those classes [*in high school*] ahead of time was helpful." Sylvia shared that college-level classes are more discussion-based than the high school classes because "in high school, it's not so much. Just do the work."

In addition to the change in the level of coursework that the students in the study experienced while in college, the role their parents played in motivating them to study also changed in college. For example, Colleen found that by having her parents around, making her accountable to someone else other than herself, had immediate consequences for her to study because she could have her phone taken away but now “it’s. . . different because they are not here. I think if I was threatened a little more [*by my parents*], it’ll probably be more motivational rather than what it is now.” These students also found that they had to work harder to manage their time around the academic and social activities that college provided because as Colleen shared “It might seem like we don’t have a lot of free time but we actually do”. For Sharron who attended a two-year private college, “you have to learn to say no here. Otherwise, you can be involved in things and you never sleep.”

Another significant transition for first-year students, Andy and Colleen, who both attended a four-year research institution was managing their homework. During the first few weeks of school, both of them did their homework right after class. As Colleen shared, “I was still in high school mode”. As she realized that there were no immediate consequences for not doing her homework, she stopped doing it right after class but then “it [*her homework*] started punishing me because I was like I don’t remember what the teacher said”. Learning how to successfully manage their study time with the extracurricular activities was a skill that both of them continued to work on throughout their first semester but also acknowledged the benefit of attending a pre-college program that allowed them to spend time on campus in the summer three weeks before school

started made their transition to college that much easier, “coming to [*this scholarship program*] really helped a lot actually.”

Finally, for Olivia who attended a four-year private institution, the academic expectations of college were an easy transition because she was already motivated to learn new things

. . . I mean I love to learn. That is something that I’ve always enjoyed. And so that’s motivation just for me in the morning and be like oh yes, I get to go to this class and learn about this, etc. I just like expanding my knowledge and being able to see how that applies to my life and learning things that I didn’t know before and being able to exhibit those things or reproduce those things [*outside the classroom*].

Summary for Question 2

The students in the study all recognized differences in their expectations and the reality of the social and academic experiences of college life. Whether the differences involved making new friends, getting involved in campus activities or just adjusting to the pace of college work, all of the students collectively agreed that they are much better students for attending college and the adjustment was just part of the transition. Jojo realized a new perspective about her role and motivation for being in college that probably best sums up all of the students’ thoughts in the study,

For me, [*sic*] it’s just the fact that I know that one thing that stands out to me in my classes is that I see a lot of older people to coming back so education is important. And that kind of stands out. Other people are still coming back to get an education, and I have a lot of goals for my life and it all revolves around me getting some type of degree so that is motivation for me to always stay in and do my best, even though we have restrictions like scholarships and stuff and we need to do well in this area or that area. I just think the fact that if you have someone that really has a goal for their life like in this economy and society and everything, you need an education to do that.

Research Question 3

3. How did students' expectation of college social life inform the students' choices, actions and social integration during their first and second year?

Answer to Research Question 3

1st year students

Students in the study quickly realized during their first semester of college that their extracurricular involvement and academic performance in high school played a significant role in their transition to college life. For Joy, serving as a peer educator during her senior year of high school allowed her to educate younger teens about the risks of teen pregnancy. In this role, she participated in many workshops that allowed her to practice her oral presentation skills. In her words

. . . that really made me more confident and helped me to be able to speak in front of people. . . And in the end prepared me for college because it boosted my confidence and I felt a lot better about myself . . . then being involved with clubs and volunteer activities . . . really helped to mature me and get me ready for college.

Becky learned the importance of building relationships with faculty was the key in navigating college coursework.

. . . make sure you go see your professors. If you have a question about anything, professors would rather have you come talk to them and spend a minute of their time explaining it to you than having you not get it on test day and try to ask him about it right before the test. They would much prefer you coming in and grasping the concepts because that's what they're here for. That's what they're paid to do is help you understand [*the information*].

Similarly, Joy reiterated the important role that faculty played in assisting in a student's adjustment to college-level coursework as well as a student's general satisfaction with college life. These students all seemed to gain self-confidence in their abilities to persist

through their classes when they realized that faculty members were accessible and willing to help them,

. . . .read past what your teachers tell you. Go in on your teachers' office hours and meet with them and get help when you need it. Here [*case study institution #2*] we are encouraged to go see our professors and I think that's different than at a big university. . . .take advantage of that time and get help from them because they are so willing to help us.

No matter the institution type or size, students could not emphasize more the importance of getting involved on campus. Consider Peggy in her own words who emphasized

Involvement is definitely a huge part ofthe college experience and getting the academic side of it. You really have to learn to say no here. Otherwise you can be involved in things and you never sleep. . . .It really does have benefits to being involved and it means that I want to stay in college

At times, it seemed almost overwhelming to realize the number of choices that students could select from in terms of student organizations. Olivia observed

I think the hardest thing for me at the very beginning when we got here, we had all these fairs of all the different activities we could participate, church fair and college ministries fair, be way involved and we had all these activities and stuff that we could be involved in and I wanted to do everything. Like I honestly wanted to put my name on every single list b/c it was like maybe I can fit this into my schedule and then you know I have classes too and I have to develop relationships, I have to eat meals, I have to sleep too and it was just more like being able to pick and choose and manage my time to where I get my homework done and I get to spend time with friends, and I get to do everything that I need and want to do.

Keup (2007) conducted a study on first year students and expectations of college and she shared a concept she coined 'disillusionment'. The current study found similar themes as some students mentioned that roommates were one of the most challenging relationships during their first year. For Marsha, her relationship with her roommate deteriorated to the point that she had to move out of her suite

I'd have to say the hardest part [*of this year*] is getting along with some of the people. Because here recently, I'm having to move out of my suite because me and my roommate can't seem to get along. So the different personalities kind of mixing and not yet combining kind of affects your school work and your working because I have to work on campus. . . it kind of affects you . . . in every way because you try to put up with it for so long and you have to find a balance and sometimes the balance is moving out.

2nd-year students

For many of the sophomores in the study, having a year to adjust to college made a huge difference in their social integration during their second year of college. At this point, these students had an established group of friends and no longer had the same first-year student pressures of having to recreate friendships. At the same time, these students were familiar with their respective campuses and had a better idea of the resources that were available to them versus their first year. Many students mentioned academic learning centers, where they received assistance in writing papers, foreign language tutoring, or math homework. All of the students mentioned the importance of visiting their professors during office hours, before or after class. Other students talked about the professional resources available on campus for counseling or health-related concerns. The students collectively agreed that getting help is available everywhere and in Peggy's words, "it really just depends on what you're looking for." Still other students mentioned specific staff members and their residence assistants (RAs) as invaluable resources in their college experience. Susan attended a small comprehensive institution and said "you can always talk to your RA." For Mary Alice, she attended a large public research institution ". . . if it's school-related, then I go to TC because I can go to him for anything. Maybe he wouldn't know what to say most of the time, but he'll know where to direct me

to go find the answer”. Identifying campus staff members that they could relate to and who were accessible seemed to be key in the students’ emotional adjustment. For Becky

I found it really helpful to go to Eva (*first-year leadership program instructor*). She’s got a big couch in her room and I just go sit there and talk to her about my problems. Like last week, I got the first ticket of my life and I was in there bawling, trying to figure out what to do. Talking about how I didn’t want to tell my parents because they weren’t exactly happy about me being out on my own at 17. So you know, then I’d get a lecture on how responsibility is something you just need to take upon yourself. But when I had a problem with the registrar’s office, she called over there for me and you know she talked to one of her friends over there and got it figured out. So I mean it’s always really good to make a connection with a professor or an instructor and you know they can always help you out. Like my academic advisor is also one of my professors so anytime after class if I need anything, I just walk over to his office and he’ll fix it for me.

Unlike the experiences of the first-year students in the study, roommates were a source of support and encouragement both socially and academically. Students found themselves looking to roommates as motivation to do their homework and continuing to push each other to do better in their classes. Peggy explains “We were really close. . . because we were the friendship circle. . . . We were always there for each other. Like pushing each other . . .” Becky attended a private two-year college and shared “we’re roommates and we have a thing on Sundays. We [*ask each other*] did you apply for scholarships this week? Like finding a good support system here is really important because they can help push you. They kind of reaffirm your goals.”

Surprisingly, some of the students’ expectations that college was going to just be one big party turned out to not be a significant factor in their adjustment to college life. For example, Peggy attends a two-year college and stated “if people go and party, it’s their own decision and there’s no pressure. Like I was expecting that [*there would be pressure*], like college is one great big party and it’s like no, you’re one great big party!

It's all personal decision which was a good thing to find out." For others, like James who attends a large four-year research institution, the transition from a first to second year student signaled a change in priorities

. . .I've lived the life and part life, do stuff crazy randomly at 2 in the morning. Now [*as a sophomore*], it's like let's focus on getting all A's, let's focus on, more so like good stuff. . . now partying, last year partying was number two or three on my priority list, now it's like four or five.

Further, the second year of college brought with it a renewed appreciation for college life and the independence that came along with it. Second-year students did not experience the same levels of homesickness as they did during their first-year of college.

For Becky

"[*During my first year*], it was really hard to be here and I was missing home. I had to keep reminding myself that Christmas is only this far away. I'm going to be going home soon and it's not that big a deal. And this year [*as a sophomore*], I don't have to remind myself that because having all my friends [*here*] and they are my family now. My family is here. It's the personal relationships that you make that help the second year a lot.

Similar to the first year, sophomores still relied on the support of family and friends for emotional and financial support. In Becky's case, "I talk to my mom every day. And so if I would do poorly on a test, she would say, well, there's nothing you can do about that. Just make sure you learn from it and do better on the next one. I keep that in mind a lot. For Jonah who attends a four-year research institution, he shared that although his family sent him money very often during his freshman year, as a second year student with a part-time job on campus, that financial support did not come as frequently, "My mom will call me because I have a work study [*job*] now and so if I need some money, I have to call somebody. Ain't nobody going to voluntarily send it."

Conclusion for Question 3

The role that the students' expectations in the current study informed their social integration into college life during their first and second year of college was dictated by a number of factors. For the first-year students, being actively involved in high school extracurricular activities helped to build confidence in joining college-level organizations. For others, building relationships with faculty assisted students in adjusting to the course work and higher expectations that college held for them. Unfortunately for other first-year students, disintegrating relationships with roommates was a source of stress in their first year that was unexpected.

Finally, for the second-year students, friendships were firmly established and a renewed confidence appeared in these students in the current study. Additionally, these students were more familiar with campus resources that could assist them both academically and socially. Keeping the support of family was important to both first and second year students in the study. In summary, whether the expectations were to have a firm relationship with roommates, faculty, or other students, the students in the current study utilized all the pre- and newly established relationships as sources of support during their first and second years of college. By doing so, the students were able to make decisions that were in their best interest and firmly cemented their role as a college student within their new environment.

Research Question 4

4. How did students negotiate the social transition to their first and second year of college?

Answer to Research Question 4

1st year transition

Maintaining a balancing act between academic and extracurricular activities and having supportive family during their first year were important factors that helped first year students manage the social transition to college. Stephanie attended a four-year private institution and had to learn to balance not only school, but part-time work, athletics and being involved in campus activities. For me, “just the work load and being involved. I also like had a job on top of all that, so it’s like balancing everything, all of that together.”

Nita had the support of high school teachers and family friends that encouraged and supported her. This circle of support was especially critical during her first few weeks of school which were the hardest.

Within the first few weeks, I had multiple texts from a few of them, just saying praying for you, or here are some [*bible*] verses that I hope you’ll take time to read through because faith is really important to me.

Surprisingly, the need to keep a sense of a normal routine with family was equally important in easing the transition to college. For Nita, she often called her dad after a break from her classes three days during the week

. . . and that’s when my dad will help me think through things that I normally would’ve just gone down to the basement and talked to him about or we’ll just talk about sports. And just try to keep things as normal as they were back home just so it’s one less thing that is changing.

Contact with family was also accomplished by a variety of traditional and non-traditional means. For example, a number of students in the study communicated with their family through the use of technology. Methods such as email, video-conferencing through Skype and text messaging were popular means that students utilized to

communicate with family and friends. Stephanie said “and then one of my friends and I, we Skyped each other a couple of times when we first got to college.” Nita had a similar experience “all my family, we Skype every Sunday at our family dinner where there are thirteen of us and so I get to see my cousins, aunt and uncles, my grandpa, so that’s really good.” For Susan, communicating with her brother through Skype was equally important “I’ve skyped my brother. My brother is like my best friend, someone that I look up to. So what he says means a lot to me.” The increased use of video conferencing gave the students not only a chance to talk to their family but gave them a visual contact with their family that was not available through the use of the traditional telephone call. By doing so, the students’ connection with their family members deepened through the use of video conferencing because the student received both an audio and visual means of contact.

Besides the non-traditional means of communication with their college student such as video conferencing and text messaging, families still relied on the traditional means of sending of care packages. For the researcher, this was a comforting notion to discover that care packages are still relevant for today’s college student who typically tend to need immediate gratification. Susan said “I’ve gotten a couple of packages from people at home” as well as Stephanie who mentioned that family supported her through the use of “care packages” too.

Support from home was not only appreciated through the sending of care packages, phone calls and video conferencing but the support from best friends back home was also important in helping the students in their transition to college. Susan expressed to the researcher

Yeah, I think even now it’s still really hard. And we’ve been here for almost a semester. Like I still call my best friend almost every day. We spend hours on the

phone kind of stuff. But I do agree with you that once you kind of find your group, then it's a lot easier to deal with but it's still tough because you still miss the people who have been there your entire life.

By visiting home during the semester, Jojo realized that her family was “okay without me.” This fact alone helped her to feel more comfortable at college because her family “did just a good job for giving me enough space.” So not only were the students more secure knowing that their family was checking on them on a regular basis, physically visiting their hometown and knowing family was secure was an additional emotional checkpoint that helped to ease the transition to college.

Overall, the ability to develop deep interpersonal relationships was a constant theme throughout the interviews with students in the study, particularly for first-year students. For many of them, developing interpersonal relationships was one of the hardest things to deal with while in college. For example, Nita stated that

I think the hardest part for me has been back home I had deep relationships and I didn't have to step out of her comfort zone with those and you get here and honestly I have no room to talk b/c honestly I have 4 of my best friends from high school here. But you're like everybody is in the same place and like Ally said you want to be strong but at the same time, you're miserable in some senses at first. So not having those deep relationships and not knowing how to make friends. I haven't had to make friends since kindergarten so you know that's a little on the tougher side.

Getting involved in campus activities seemed to help ease the transition to college because it gave many of the students in the study an opportunity to meet other students. However, particularly true for first-year students in the study who quickly realized that they needed to have the ability to say no to the many activities that were available to them

Like I honestly wanted to put my name on every single list because it was like maybe I can fit this into my schedule and then you know I have classes too and I have to develop relationships, I have to eat meals, I have to sleep too and it was

just more like being able to pick and choose and manage my time to where I get my homework done and I get to spend time with friends, and I get to do everything that I need and want to do.

Students also mentioned specific first-year experience programs as being essential to their success in college, particularly in their first year. In particular, for students at a four-year comprehensive institution, being involved in a selective leadership program created by the President of the institution helped them to “feel like you’re a part of something on campus” according to Susan. Other students at a four-year research institution found a first-year pre-college program to be critical in their adjustment to campus as underrepresented students in engineering.

In addition to campus activities and first-year programs, some of the students in the study found comfort in collegiate athletics. Being part of a team encouraged Sylvia to find a balance and motivation between her academic and extracurricular activities.

Sylvia attended a four-year private institution and mentioned

Coming in, I knew I was going to be on the cross country team and stuff like that. And I didn’t know how much it was going to affect me but it’s probably the only reason why like I’ve tried so hard in my classes so I can run. Just building the relationships on the team have been really encouraging and having each other’s support so that’s probably like the best thing with like help me going and being a part of the team. The season is about to end this week so we’ll see how rest of semester goes.

2nd year transition

For the second-year students in the study, the sophomore year entailed a growing independence and confidence in adjusting to college life. Realizing that setting goals, joining student organizations and staying true to personal beliefs are critical to a successful transition to college, the sophomores found their second year of college to be full of opportunities and eye-opening experiences.

Sharron and Kathy both had experiences internationally that helped them to transition to the social environment of college. Sharron was an exchange student in Chile and in her words, “. . . that was the first time I had a roommate, that was the first time that I had to really be away from home. I think if people go out and get away from home just for a short period of time during high school, it makes it a bit easier to go off to college.”

Kathy explained that the international experience also allowed her to be more independent from her parents, “I did a mission trip in Guatemala and also working at a summer camp one summer. Stuff like that that kind of forces you to get out of your home, away from your parents. . . You kind of have to fend for yourself. And so that prepared me too.”

Realizing the possibilities that college provided in terms of leadership opportunities was also an important component in helping these students transition to the college social environment. Kathy did not realize that there would be so many opportunities to be involved

I also expected not to have so much involvement. Here you can be president of a club and be in multiple other clubs and there’s tons of volunteer opportunities and tons of activities on campus. And I was kind of picturing that you have a set routine- you go to class, do your homework and eat dinner and you’re done but here it’s like there’s always something every night to do on campus.

Besides the leadership opportunities available on campus, many of the sophomores in the study realized that setting personal goals as well as having supportive friends, faculty and staff support them in achieving these goals is important in making a successful social transition to college. Specifically, Sharron said

I’d say also another way like that keeps you in college is like having goals. Like knowing what you want and even though you might not know right on how to attain that goal, you have people all around you that can help you figure out way to reach

that goal so I think it's important to know what you want and what you're striving for.

Barbara and Kathy agreed that by having goals as well as feeling more settled into campus during their sophomore year of college instilled in them a renewed confidence, "for the second year, you know what to expect so you're more confident." The renewed confidence also brought with it an ability to handle the challenging of their personal beliefs, whether those be spiritual or otherwise, "And so then going back [*home for a break*], it just kind of refocused my beliefs and coming back [*to college*], I felt like I was stronger in them and so it's easier to stick to [*my personal beliefs*].

Sherry had similar feelings regarding the importance of setting goals, ". . .It's hard to go through college and do well when you don't know what you're going to do. So kind of figuring out your career goals early on is very important." Finding internships related to their major was an important step in helping to align career and class goals. For Steven, "I actually worked over the summer in a lab at Jones Mercy in Kansas City. That helped me out and I learned a lot of things about how it's going to be hard classes [*in medical school*]."

Many of the students realized in their second year that trying to be all things to all people results in their own grades suffering. Realizing, at times, it is equally important to put individual needs first was one of the realizations of the sophomore year

Like I'm an RA in my suite and the only senior. I'm immediately the person that they come to with anything and everything. And one of my problems that I'm having right now is I am not your mom. And so that's kind of become a struggle where it's just like back and forth.

Finding a way to create effective social support systems in college was difficult for the students in the study but the students quickly realized the importance of doing so. In Kathy's words, "basically all other support systems are like all torn away and then

you're creating new ones." Kathy also shared that "the main thing [*in college*] is [*creating*] interpersonal relationships." When the students discussed the tearing away of support systems, they referred to their parents and friends from their hometowns as critical in their social transition to college. For many of the students, going off to college helped them to gain a greater appreciation for their parents. In Sharron's situation, she shared "you don't realize how important [those relationships] are . . . until that's what you really need." Barbara agreed because she realized that "until the ones you do have are no longer close to you, like parents."

College also meant a time of self-discovery in their social transition. Barbara found that "realizing you are an adult now and you can make your own decisions and stuff. It's really empowering. You realize just how much you can do [*on your own*]." Part of that empowerment meant that the students needed to surround themselves with positive people in their new environment. Sherry pointed out

I try to surround myself with positive people. My family has been a positive influence in my life. By just keeping yourself around those positive things help you to not, I don't know, put yourself down for not being satisfied with I guess your career goals or not knowing what direction to go in.

Sophomores in the study who lived close to their college found that by having regular interactions with family helped them to balance the stress of adjusting to college. For

Sherry

[my family] basically supports me by having family dinners or making sure we at least talk on the phone every day. And just making sure the stressful aspect of my life is balanced by good experiences, you know, just having family time and boyfriend time.

Steven even found that his mother not only helped him get moved into his residence hall room but enjoyed registering him for his classes

My mom helps me do my schedule every semester so I don't have to do that. She picks the classes that she thinks I should take. I pretty much go with that. Sometimes I change a few things.

In addition to the support that their parents provided, students also found that parents put a pressure for them to succeed academically. Parents did this in a variety of ways- from comparison to siblings who had or had not been successful in college to criticism and judgment. For Steven, "I have like a 3.75 (GPA) right now and that's better than my brothers ever had." But for Sherry her parents were very strict on her in terms of her academics

If I had less than an A at any point in time, it was like a slap on the wrist type of experience. So I kind of wish there had been more support and encouragement overall instead of a constant nagging and focusing on the bad elements when there were so many other good things they could've praised me for.

Sherry also expressed to the researcher the tremendous pressure she felt from her parents to succeed where her other siblings had not

I think sibling comparison is good to a point but with mine like, my stepbrother went to college for 6 years and didn't get a degree. My stepsister has 2 children and she's only 23 so I think that that created an even larger push for me to be like perfect. Like I had to make up for everything. So I almost think that if it's a healthy sibling rivalry then it's good. But on the other hand if the parents are the ones that are projecting that on you, then it's not good.

Summary for Question 4

Students negotiated the social transition to their first and second year of college in a mixture of ways. For first-year students, maintaining a balance between their academic and extracurricular activities was important. However, having a connection to family and friends was equally important in their transition. Students maintained contact with family through web-based video conferencing, text messaging and telephone calls. Parents often

visited their student, sent care packages or helped them with their classes. First-year students also found that interpersonal relationships were difficult to form during their first semester of college and often relied on close friendships formed in high school. Once students got involved in campus activities, their network of friendships widened and deepened, so much that many of them developed core friendships by the end of their first semester of college. Additionally, first-year students found connections with university faculty and staff through first-year experience programs and frequently relied on these relationships to get them through difficult times in their first semester. Becky reflected on the support she received from her first-year experience instructor and her academic advisor,

I found it really helpful to go to [*my first-year experience instructor*). She's got a big couch in her room and I just go sit there and talk to her about my problems. Like last week, I got the first ticket of my life and I was in there bawling, trying to figure out what to do. Talking about how I didn't want to tell my parents because they weren't exactly happy about me being out on my own at 17. So you know, then I'd get a lecture on how responsibility is something you just need to take upon yourself. But when I had a problem with the registrar's office, she called over there for me and you know she talked to one of her friends over there and got it figured out. So I mean it's always really good to make a connection with a professor or an instructor and you know they can always help you out. Like my academic advisor is also one of my professors so anytime after class if I need anything, I just walk over to his office and he'll fix it for me.

Second-year students negotiated the social transition to college by setting realistic goals, joining student organizations and staying true to their personal beliefs. Some of the sophomores relied on the international experience they received while in high school. By doing so, they felt a renewed confidence and appreciation for diversity and meeting new people. Experience abroad also allowed them to have independence from their parents that translated into a smoother transition to college life.

Overall, the sophomores in the study realized the social transition involved a time of self-discovery. The students realized they were growing into adult roles that meant making their own decisions and for many of them, that was an empowering feeling. Other students found that pressure from parents continued to motivate them to succeed academically.

No matter how the students negotiated the transition, there was definitely growth emotionally and socially from the first to second year of college for the students in the current study. Coming in as insecure first-year students, the sophomores were confident and established in their goals and what they wanted to accomplish during their second year. It was clear that without the support of family, friends, faculty and staff, the social transition for these students would have been much more difficult.

Research Question 5

5. What were students' perceptions of how internal and external influences shaped and/or supported their adjustment to the collegiate environment during their first and second year?

Answer to Research Question 5

1st year external influences

External influences shaped first-year students adjustment to the college environment in a variety of ways. Experiencing campus culture, religion, roommate issues and parental influences were keys to how students adjusted to college in their first year.

For the students who attended the private four-year institution that was religious-based, many of them talked about the importance of having a spiritual power in their life

that guided their decision-making processes. Olivia explained, “you know God opened all the doors and it was one of those things where I could tell this is where I needed to be and this was where I was going to be able to fulfill my purpose for my college career.” Jojo shared a similar sentiment, “and God has me here for a reason and I just need to figure out what that is and bless other people in the process.” Adjusting to college also meant learning to live with another person. Roommate issues ran the spectrum from mild adjustment issues to irreconcilable differences. Stephanie described her roommate situation

My room is not my own anymore. I have three other siblings, but I never really had to share a room. So it’s been really hard. Like I’ve never had to share a bathroom. So yeah, I can’t just leave my stuff everywhere. I feel really bad because like I have more than half the room and my roommate is pretty chill about it.

For Becky, adjusting to roommate schedules was another issue

I think the main thing for me is learning to live with somebody else because I was always used to my schedule kind of stuff. Now that I have a roommate, we don’t have the exact same schedule. We have to learn to cooperate and get around it. You know the girls in my hall who like to stay out and you know party and come back at 2 in the morning and yell out in the hallway. It’s like ok guys thanks a lot. I have a test at 9 o’clock tomorrow morning. But I think it’s just learning to be flexible and just taking it as it comes.

Another student had a polar opposite experience with her roommate. For Marsha, the roommate issues became too difficult for her to resolve

I’d have to say the hardest part is getting along with some of the people. Because here recently, I’m having to move out of my suite because me and my roommate can’t seem to get along. So the different personalities kind of mixing and not yet combining kind of affects your school work and your working b/c I have to work on campus. So it kind of affects you yourself in every way b/c you try to put up with it for so long and you have to find a balance and sometimes the balance is moving out.

Adjusting to the college environment meant adjusting to a very different campus culture. A campus culture that, particularly for students at the four-year private school, meant having to sacrifice friendships with male friends. Nita explained the culture in this way, “the culture here, it’s like if you’re hanging out with a guy, people are like, “oh I bet there’s something there.” [At] Christian schools it’s like you date and you marry.”

Jojo reiterated the campus culture in relation to the opposite sex

I talked to a guy for like 30 seconds. This happened, this is my first week where I haven’t talked to any guys and I go up to one guy and I talk to him for one minute and someone comes up and they’re like “oh wedding bells”. So it’s a little different here.

For many students, the campus culture of dating is a financial reality for their parents.

Jojo was told “my parents said that they’re all for me getting married right now because then a guy can pay for my tuition”. In Nita’s situation, she just wanted to have a platonic friendship with a guy but because of the campus culture of perceived relationships with males and females, the societal and cultural pressures were too much to even just have dinner in the dining hall

It’s like you can’t really have just a free relationship with a guy b/c other people on the outside are putting pressure on it even if they don’t necessarily need to. So it’s not like I can just eat dinner with my guy friend b/c people will be like “oh you guys are having dinner together”. Like where’s the ring?

Olivia even described the situation in more detail adding

My RA and I were talking about this. I went to a Christian high school before coming here and at a Christian high school, if you start hanging out with a guy, there are guy/girl friendships but it’s usually in groups. And if you start really hanging out with one guy, you’re likely to date but the difference with high school and college is in high school you can’t get married. As soon as you get here, it’s almost you have that same mentality like oh if I seriously start hanging out with one guy, maybe I’ll start dating him. But then you like automatically jump from date to marriage because you can get married now so it’s like this

freedom that everybody's like oh you're going to meet a boy but you don't have too.

Finally, parental influences shaped the students experience during their first semester of college. Some of the students had to balance parents wanting them to come home to parents telling them to stay. Stephanie's parents missed her so much, they encouraged her to come home

. . . my family misses me just as much as I miss them so they're encouraging me to come home. They're like you can come home, and you can go to school closer to home. It's still. . . school but . . . there's nothing like this school. Like it's so different and there's like so much security here.

However, Stephanie is very involved in collegiate athletics as a cross-country athlete and felt very connected to her teammates. This connection helped her to adjust to the college environment.

During orientation, university administrators gave Nita's parents and others the following advice -"they told the parents not letting your kids come home until they like being at college is a good thing and not encouraging them to come home." According to Jojo

. . .my parents did a good job of preparing her for college life. With the fact that they did a good job letting me take on more responsibility and make my own decisions. Like the transition between being my parents to being more like my advisors and mentors. I love them and miss them. They did a really good job of that.

Other parents supported their first-year study by sending cards. For Becky, it meant a lot to her that her dad sent her cards

I thought it was so sweet when my daddy sent me a card a couple of weeks ago. It just kind of instilled in me that you know that he's really proud of me. That's one thing that's hard for him is to like express pride or emotion in anything and so when he does tell that he's proud of you, you know he means it. Just having him send me a card just reminded me that I can get through just about anything and he's always there to support me.

For Andy, his parents had high expectations for him to do well during his first year of college. His parents as well as his older siblings who were all college-educated created additional pressure for Andy to perform at a high level

My mom and dad would call me and make sure I have good grades and everything and if I don't, they would say, you better stay on top of that, you better get some help if you need it. I'm like okay I will. It's like you know, typical mom and dad things.

Finally, parental influence extended to the use of the latest technology, such as video conferencing and text messaging in order to maintain contact with their first-year student

Within the first few weeks, I had multiple texts from a few of them, just saying praying for you, or here are some verses that I hope you'll take time to read through because faith is really important to me. And I also, all my family, we Skype every Sunday at our family dinner where there are 13 of us and so I get to see my cousins, aunt and uncles, my grandpa, so that's really good.

1st year internal influences

The effect of internal influences on the first-year students' perceptions of the adjustment to the collegiate environment included learning to work more efficiently on school work and finding internal motivation to continue to make it through college. Many of the students experienced different types of parental influence from parents not being as supportive of their choice of school to parents not being involved in their college experience at all. No matter the type of support from external influences, such as parents, still created a need for the students to look within themselves for the strength to persevere. One significant experience for one of the first-year students involved her father dying within just weeks of this focus group interview. However, her older sister attended the same college so she found additional support from family to deal with the transition to college life and a family tragedy

. . .but from home my parents were very supportive and were really encouraged my decision to come here and were really excited and I called them every day and so I had support from that. Since my dad was a college professor that like influenced a lot of the college experience but he died 3 weeks ago so I mean like I had to go home. I still have the support from my family but it's still a challenge [*adjusting to college*].

Becky found a division in her household between her parents when it came to her choice of college

My parents were always really supportive during high school of anything I did. But my Dad went to [*my college*] so he was ecstatic when I chose to go here. But my mom went to [a different college] and is still not grasping the fact that I made a good choice for me. Like my sister went to [*the same college as her mother*] so she fulfilled the family legacy and my mom was ecstatic and goes to everything for her and will drive to [*that school*] just to go see her. My mom like we have the game up at [*local football stadium*] coming up. My Dad was so excited, he got us tickets. We're going together but my mom wanted nothing to do with it. She's always really happy to see me when I come home but it's like my sister is 40 minutes away from home and I'm like 2 hours away from home. I think you know she wishes I would've picked [*her college*] so I could be closer and so that I would be a [*her college mascot*] but I just knew it wasn't right for me. I guess I just wish she was a little more accepting of the fact [*this school*] is where I belong, not where she belongs. I'm very happy with my decision to be here.

Clearly, the first year was a big adjustment for many of these students and for the first time, they realized the importance of a strong upbringing by family to maintain their focus while in college. For Nita, her academic preparation in high school prepared her for college-level work but being away from family was still a difficult adjustment

. . .some people have never had the college classes coming in. And also for us it was one less thing that we had to get adjusted because time management on it's on is a whole new thing when you're in college because you're adjusting in so many ways. I'm 4 hours from home. Some of you guys are 12. I mean there's plenty to adjust to [*e.g. being away from family and friends*] without the workload being that much harder.

Marsha was the product of a single parent household. Her mother was extremely supportive of her decision to attend college

My mom is the only parent I have. So she has been supportive. She'll drop everything just to come up here if I say I need help but it's the kind of help where she doesn't do it for me. She just gives suggestions because she's like you're an adult now. You're not always going to have me. You need to learn this on your own. So it's kind of like, as she says, it's the mother bird syndrome, where she's pushing me out of the nest. But at the same time she's going to be there if I fall.

Internal motivation included having a natural love of learning to learning self-discipline.

For students like Olivia, college meant waking up every day to a new adventure in the classroom

I absolutely love teaching and learning and school and all of that really. I know that sounds really nerdy. But I mean I love to learn. That is something that I've always enjoyed. And so that's motivation just for me in the morning and be like oh yes, I get to go to this class and learn about this, etc. I just like expanding my knowledge and being able to see how that applies to my life and learning things that I didn't know before and being able to exhibit those things or reproduce those things.

For students like Colleen, the need to develop a more disciplined schedule was key to her getting her work done in a timely manner. Learning to work smarter, not necessarily harder was one concept that the first-year students had to learn to do when it came to classroom work

The things that I do individually is live in the library. I don't leave until 1 or until it closes. I know. It's a long time. If I leave, I know I will go back to the dorm and go to sleep. So it's kind of a motivational thing. I think, I know if I leave now, I'm not going to finish this work or . . . I won't do the other work that I need to do. So I just stay and make sure I get everything done, no matter how long it takes or at least until they tell me to get out.

Finally, for Susan, growing up in a household where her mother was never supportive of any of her endeavors made adjusting to college a little bit easier because she was used to being on her own. Susan gained an early understanding of the need to make adult

decisions in college as well as understanding the hard work and discipline that is required to succeed

I have raised myself since I was 12 so I'm pretty independent. In college, there's a lot of things you could fall into, like drugs, you could fall into drinking, not going to class. Like there's a lot of bad decisions you could make and being independent and having raised myself and having known for myself what is best, I'm not going to fall into any negative activity.

Susan was also carrying the financial responsibility of paying for college. Despite the financial support from a partial track scholarship, the remainder of the financial burden fell on her shoulders

Also I'm paying for my own college. Like I have to pay for everything. So I can't, I'm not going to screw up. I have a track scholarship but it's not like it's a full ride. I had to pay \$1,400 cash for housing this semester and I handed it to her. It was my money. It sucked!

2nd year external influences

The sophomores in the study found that adjusting to college involved having a positive social network. For example, involvement in Greek life, pressure from siblings who had already been to college, a small circle of supportive friends, financial and emotional support from parents were all critical influences to their adjustment to life in college. Comparable to the first-year students, sophomores in the study expressed the importance of relying on a higher spiritual power for guidance during difficult times.

Steven was in charge of setting up tutoring hours for members of his fraternity. In this role, he felt an additional pressure to ensure that his grades were in good standing

...living the fraternity house, everybody pretty much knows how good everyone is doing, grades and stuff like that. So they, me being the person in charge of grades they would get on to me if I wasn't doing good. Because we have to maintain a certain GPA to stay in the house basically or else we're on suspension.

If fraternity pressure were not enough, consider the pressure felt from comparisons to siblings that had already attended college and not done as well as expected. Both Steven and Sherry felt the pressure. Steven shared “I have like a 3.75 (GPA) right now and that’s better than my brothers ever had”. Sherry did not agree that sibling comparisons were necessarily a positive strategy to utilize in her case, “

I think sibling comparison is good to a point but with mine like, my stepbrother went to college for 6 years and didn’t get a degree. My stepsister has 2 children and she’s only 23 so I think that that created an even larger push for me to be like perfect. Like I had to make up for everything. So I almost think that if it’s a healthy sibling rivalry then it’s good. But on the other hand if the parents are the ones that are projecting that on you, then it’s not good.

Other students at a four-year research institution found that having a social circle of friends was an encouraging support system

Have a social circle of people that are in the same situation as you. Most of the people that are my close friends, such as James or other individuals who are in the same place as I am and even the same major. A lot of us are having the same struggles so it’s good to have that circle and that type of support group.

Jonah agreed that a support system is important, particularly when family is so far away.

The new support system of friends created a second family for many of these students

Honestly what I did was I made friends. You know, it’s not just you, it’s not just us up here. Struggling trying to find out about the college life. So I just made friends and we all found out what we were going to do together. How we were going to get through this homework, trying to having fun. Trying to stay out of trouble and what not. So I just tried to find people who were involved with good things and in positive things and really got close to them and that helped me a lot. Though I miss my mom and brothers and stuff, I had people up here who I grew to love and so that was my biggest thing for transitioning.

In addition to friends providing support, students reiterated the importance of financial support as being critical in their adjustment to college. Jonah said

I think the biggest thing is they would randomly send me money all the time. And being a freshman with no job, I was always broke all the time. Random \$20, \$30 would make me so happy.

However, in their sophomore year, parents did not send money as frequently as they did when the students were freshman. It was clear that for these students, they noticed the difference. Jonah laughed when he realized that now that he was working and more adjusted to college, he had to now call home for that twenty or thirty dollars

My mom will call me [during my sophomore year] because I have a work study now and so if I need some money, I have to call somebody. Ain't nobody going to voluntarily send it. That's about it. They still love me I believe!

Like the first-year students, a reliance on technology to communicate with parents and family was just as critical in the sophomore year adjustment. For Jonah, "they talked to me on Face book [and] called me". Even though Sharron still spoke to her mom on the phone, now that she was a sophomore, those calls were not as frequent

When it comes to my mom and me talking, because last year [*during my first year*] we talked a lot. This year, she has to poke and prod me to call her. Because it's always something different going during the times I'm supposed to call so like we still text a lot and we talk for sure once a week. But it's different because I feel more established in who I am and what I'm doing [*in college*].

2nd year internal influences

Sophomores found that the internal influences were very similar to the first-year students. Having an internal motivation is critical to adjusting to college, especially because these students are still learning to live independently. Sherry expressed the following sentiment

I think that being in college you have to be somewhere you really, really enjoy being at. Otherwise you're not going to be motivated. So basically I think just waking up in the morning and feeling like you're somewhere that you deserve to be at. . . It's hard to go through college and do well when you don't know what you're going to do. So kind of figuring out your career goals early on is very important.

Sherry also found that attending college classes while in high school helped to prepare her not only academically, but mentally as well, “I agree self-motivation is probably one of the top difficulties in college”. In relation to her high school preparation, Sherry noted

Like I said this is my hometown and even during my senior year of high school, I was taking college classes on [*this campus*] so that transition kind of helped me understand what it is like going to class everyday and having to walk and trying to find a parking spot and understanding the higher workload in the classes. But other than that, because I already had a small experience here at [*this college*], the transition was very simple for me. Basically, just preparing yourself to have to get yourself out of bed every morning, and if you have breaks between classes, making yourself go to the next class. That was probably just the best preparation you could do.

Balancing the expectations of college being a big party was also an adjustment for some students in the study. Steven lived in a fraternity house on campus his sophomore year and shared his experience, “I think another aspect is getting used to the whole like social party scene. That can be, balancing that out between staying involved and trying to do other things.” For other students, like James, the sophomore year brought with it, a clearer focus on goals versus the party scene on campus

This year, the transition from freshman to sophomore year, it’s kind of like, I’ve lived the life and party life, do stuff crazy randomly at 2 in the morning. Now it’s like ok let’s focus on getting all A’s, let’s focus on, more so like good stuff. That’s my thing. Now partying, last year partying was number 2 or 3 on my priority list, not it’s like 4 or 5.

Jonah shared a similar perspective in the difference in the first and second year in terms of priorities

For me, first year was pretty much determination. I want to make it through my freshman year. I want to do well. I want to say I’m in college and I’m doing good. And to transition to the second year, it was like motivation. It’s like I told myself you need to crack down because this is where it’s getting serious. The year has gone by and you really need to find out what you want to do with your life. Now I’m motivating myself telling myself I want to live happy. I want to have some

type of career where I'm excited to wake up every morning. Looking forward to that and thinking about that keeps me going. That's how I transitioned to my second year, thinking about success.

Developing themselves as adults and finding themselves responsible for their success (or failure) became another critical component for the sophomores in the study

Adjustment was hard and long. Me being away from my parents for months at a time was very different for me. Even going home for a weekend, it was different having to leave so quickly. I guess you could say, in high school, you see your parents everyday versus seeing them a weekend a month. That was a big transition. I have little brothers so that was very different too. I missed them on a daily basis too. It was very difficult for me. As far as how did I transition, it was more or less getting my mind set around being on my own and being my own man. Having the responsibilities and taking a hold of that instead of looking at the negative.

The second-year students realized that finding a core group of friends they could trust was even more important during their second year. During his first year, James encountered roommate problems and other situations that he considered "hard lessons learned"

And another thing that was hard was balancing relationships and figuring out ok, who are my real friends, what people are for me, what people are against me, who can I confide in, who can I not confide in, and just learning what to do in certain situations, "it's not good to text to certain things" or "record certain things", stuff like that. Those were hard lessons learned.

Unlike the first-year students in the study, the sophomores found that a reliance on their own personal strengths and abilities was critical to their success in their second year. No longer did they completely rely on family but realizing that this new independence brought with it, growth and responsibility for life after college. For Mary Alice

For me for my first year to help me transition, I'd say that I leaned a lot more on like my family members and my friends to help me get through tough times. And so I could confide in them what I was going through. And then my second year, I leaned more on myself. I was like I can do this, I can get through this by myself,

so I got to be more independent and I was like I survived freshman year so sophomore year will be a breeze.

Mary Alice realized that she had to learn how to study in college because in high school, the work came much easier to her

Well for me, one of my hardest things was learning how to study because in high school I didn't have to study at all. It came really easily to me. Oh we have a test today? Oh ok, I'll take the Calculus test. But now I have to stay up all night studying to get a C. It's totally different. In high school, I got A's in everything. Now it would be good for me, I'd be ecstatic if I got an A on my Diff E exam. So it was just learning how to study. Learning how to study and learning how to actually pay attention in class and take notes and not fall asleep. And now in high school, you can't have your phone out so you kind of have to pay attention. Now you can have your phone out, you can text. And so it's hard to get those distractions out of your mind.

Analogous to the first-year students in the study, the sophomores mentioned numerous times, the presence of a higher power in helping them adjust to the difficulties of college life. For both James and Jonah, a relationship with God was critical

The Lord! I like really did my best to establish a relationship with God and keep that going so that I could stay focused at times when I needed too. And I always just challenged myself to do better. So that helped me with the transition for the first year.

Jonah explained his relationship with God in this way

It was making sure I had a relationship with God to help me stay focused, stay grounded, keep joy when things were hard and so yeah, relationship with God, very important.

Conclusion for Question 5

In the way that experiencing campus culture, religion, roommate issues and parental influences had on the first-year students, the sophomores in the study were extremely introspective in their explanation of their growth and development from freshman to sophomores. Reflecting on Justin's explanation, he summed up how both

the external and internal influences shaped the college experience for all the students in the study

I must say that college is definitely an experience. There is never a lesson in life that can prepare you for something for the experience that it is. When people say that you definitely have to live life to experience something as impacting as college, that's what it is. That's all I have to say. Because parents tell you that it's hard, pastors, etc that's been through it but you never truly know until you experience it yourself. . . I feel like college is the introduction to the rest of your life.

Only in their sophomore year but these students already realized the lifelong impact that college was going to have on the rest of their lives

It's introducing you to the real world. Whether it be relationships, economic, work, money all of that, paying bills, responsibilities. You get introduced to it in college all at once.

Many of the students in the study mentioned to the researcher multiple times that participating in the study really helped them to reflect on their college experience. The students understood how deep the experience has been for many of them on an emotional, social, spiritual, and academic level. These perceptions and experiences will only be strengthened as they continue to persist through their respective institutions.

Chapter Summary

The current study was designed to develop an understanding of undergraduate college students' social readiness for the collegiate experience. Specifically, the study examined the impact of social readiness factors in the transition of undergraduate students from high school to college. The findings included parents, siblings, friends and teachers having a significant influence over the students' perceptions of their college experience. Similarly, students in the study found that participation in extracurricular activities in high school helped in their transition to college. However, for first-year

students in the study, forming close friendships in their first year of college was difficult and often marked with disintegrating relationships with roommates. Sophomores in the study found themselves more comfortable in their college surroundings as well as having a solid base of friends. No matter the classification of students in the study or institution type, a connection to family and friends were important in the transition to college. Additionally, setting goals and achieving a balance between academic and social activities were important factors in the students' adjustment to college.

Students in the current study expressed a surprisingly deep understanding of the impact that the collegiate experience has had on them on an emotional, social, spiritual, and academic level. Many of the students described the varied experiences in college as having an “impacting” influence on their lives and consistently mentioning that no matter how prepared they felt they were for college, experiencing it for themselves was extremely important. Also, the influence of parents and family were significant factors as students moved through college and students often found a changing dynamic in their relationship with their parents. Mostly, the role of their parent moving from more of a caregiver role to more of a mentor role and for many of the students, this had a positive effect on their experience.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Having a clear understanding of the undergraduate students' college experience has been examined largely in terms of academic preparation (Bowman, 2010; Jamelske, 2009; Kahn & Nauta, 2001; Keup & Barefoot, 2005; Starke, Harth, & Sirianni, 2001; Noble, Flynn, Lee, & Hilton, 2007), but a number of studies have also examined the impact of socialization factors to college (Baker, McNeil, & Siryk, 1985; Mattanah, Ayers, Brand, Brooks, Quimby, & McNary, 2010; Weidman, 1989). The current study sought to explore the various factors that exist between college students' high school preparation and their social readiness for college. By doing so, the study explored the role that socialization played in a student's transition from high school to college. To do this, the researcher conducted focus groups interviews at four different institution types in the MidWest and Southern United States with first and second year undergraduate students.

This chapter included a summary of the study, conclusions, recommendations for future research and future practice, discussion, and chapter summary. The summary of the study contained information on the purpose and importance of the study as well as the process and results for data collection. The conclusion section summarized the results of the study. Further, recommendations for future research and practice included the researcher's suggestions for further research on the topic and recommendations for practice for higher education professionals. The chapter concluded with a discussion, summary, and related references.

Summary of the Study

Developing an understanding of undergraduate college students' social readiness for the collegiate experience was the purpose for conducting the current study. In particular, the study explored the role that socialization played in a student's transition from high school to college. Understanding students' college experiences from a sociological perspective should assist higher education administrators and faculty in developing retention initiatives for undergraduate students in the critical first and second years of college. In the current study, focus group interviews were conducted on multiple campuses in the MidWest and Southern United States with first and second year undergraduate students.

The study found that forming interpersonal relationships were important during the first and second years as well as setting goals and achieving a balance between academic and social activities in the students' adjustment. Many of the students in the study expressed a deep understanding of the impact that the collegiate experience had on them on an emotional, social, spiritual, and academic level. In addition, the influence of parents and family were significant factors as students moved through college and students often found a changing dynamic in their relationship with their parents.

Research Question 1: What were the perceptions of undergraduate college students regarding how they felt their background characteristics and precollege experiences influenced the social aspects of their collegiate experience?

a. From first-year student perspective

For first-year students, a number of factors played a role in their perceptions of their collegiate experience. For these students, taking advantage of precollege programs

such as summer programs through local colleges and universities were beneficial. By taking advantage of these opportunities, students were able to not only gain college academic credit and were given a chance to live independently from their parents. Consequently, the students were able to build relationships with college faculty and staff so that when they arrived on campus as first-year students, interactions with faculty and staff came more naturally to them. First-year students also took advantage of Advanced Placement courses while in high school. These opportunities allowed them to have the academic preparation necessary for college. Another major theme identified by first-year students was the reliance on parental support and expectations. Managing parental expectations as well as pressure from older siblings who had already attended college created additional pressure for these students to perform in their first year.

b. From second-year student perspective

For second-year students in the current study, experiences ranged from changing family dynamics to academic preparation. However, different than the first-year students, the second year students mentioned financial support, international experiences, and career expectations as influential factors affecting their college experience. A few of the second-year students took advantage of studying abroad or visiting siblings in college while in high school. By doing so, these experiences provided them with a renewed sense of independence from their parents, and this independence was crucial in their eventual adjustment to college. Similar to the first-year students, second-year students took advantage of Advanced Placement and concurrent courses while still in high school. Performing well in these courses translated into receiving scholarships to help pay for college for students in the study.

Research Question 2. What did students perceive to be the impact of their social and academic expectations of college and their actual experiences?

The students in the study all recognized differences in their expectations and the reality of the social and academic experiences of college life. Whether the differences involved making new friends, getting involved in campus activities or just adjusting to the pace of college work, all of the students collectively agreed that they were much better students for attending college and the adjustment was just part of the transition.

Research Question 3. How did students' expectations of college social life inform the students' choices, actions and social integration during their first year and second year?

The role that the students' expectations in the current study informed their social integration into college life during their first and second year of college was dictated by a number of factors. For first-year students, being actively involved in high school extracurricular activities helped to build confidence in joining college-level organizations or building relationships with faculty assisted students in adjusting to the course work and higher expectations that college held for them. Unfortunately for other first-year students, disintegrating relationships with roommates was a source of stress in their first year that was unexpected.

For the second-year students, friendships were firmly established and a renewed confidence appeared in these students in the current study. Additionally, these students were more familiar with campus resources that could assist them both academically and socially. Keeping the support of family was also important to both first and second year students in the study. Whether the expectations were to have a firm relationship with

roommates, faculty, or other students, the students in the current study utilized all the pre- and newly established relationships as sources of support during their first and second years of college. By doing so, the students were able to make decisions that were in their best interest and firmly cemented their role as a college student within their new environment.

Research Question 4. How did students negotiate the social transition to their first and second year of college?

Students negotiated the social transition to their first and second year of college in a mixture of ways. For first-year students, maintaining a balance between their academic and extracurricular activities was important. However, having a connection to family and friends was equally important in their transition. Students maintained contact with family through web-based video conferencing, text messaging and telephone calls. Parents often visited their student, sent care packages or helped them with their classes. First-year students also found that interpersonal relationships were difficult to form during their first semester of college and often relied on close friendships formed in high school. However, once students got involved in campus activities, their network of friendships widened and deepened, so that many of them developed core friendships by the end of their first semester of college. Additionally, first-year students found connections with university faculty and staff through first-year experience programs and frequently relied on these relationships to get them through difficult times in their first semester.

Research Question 5. What were students' perceptions of how internal and external influences shaped and/or supported their adjustment to the collegiate environment during their first and second year?

In the way that experiencing campus culture, religion, roommate issues and parental influences had on the first-year students, the sophomores in the study were extremely introspective in their explanation of their growth and development from freshman to sophomores. Many of the students in the study mentioned to the researcher multiple times that participating in the study really helped them to reflect on their college experience. The students understood how deep the experience has been for many of them on an emotional, social, spiritual, and academic level.

Conclusion

For both first and second year students in the current study, achieving a balance between extracurricular and academic activities while still in high school was critical to their understanding and eventual adjustment to life on a college campus. Furthermore, the researcher concluded that the effect of parents and other significant people had the biggest influence on the students' expectations and experiences about college. These individuals provided emotional, financial and social support for students in the current study. However, parental pressure resonated the loudest and weighed heavily on the students' decision-making process during their first and second years of college.

Whether the expectations were to have a firm relationship with roommates, faculty, or other students, the students in the current study utilized all the pre- and newly established relationships as sources of support during their first and second years of college. By doing so, the students were able to make decisions that were in their best interest and firmly cemented their role as a college student within their new environment.

Students negotiated the social transition to their first and second year of college in a variety of ways. For first-year students, maintaining a balance between their academic

and extracurricular activities was important. Having a connection to family, friends as well as faculty and staff on campus was equally important in their transition. First-year students also found that interpersonal relationships were difficult to form during their first semester of college and often relied on close friendships formed in high school. However, once students got involved in campus activities, their network of friendships widened and deepened, so much that many of them developed core friendships by the end of their first semester of college.

Internal and external influences shaped the students' adjustment to the collegiate environment in a number of ways. Experiencing campus culture, religion, roommate issues and parental influences were keys to how students adjusted to college in their first year. Navigating positive and negative roommate issues as well as relationships with the opposite sex were all issues involving interpersonal relationships that students in the study experienced. The students also found that having the support of parents and college administrators were key to their adjustment. Internal motivation for both first and second year students included having a natural love of learning to learning self-discipline. The sophomores in the study found that adjusting to college involved having a positive social network and adequate financial support. This adjustment included balancing the expectations of college being a big party as well as developing themselves as adults and finding themselves responsible for their success (or failure).

Recommendations

For Practice

Higher education administrators as well as faculty that work with first- and second-year undergraduates could benefit from the results of the current study. The

following recommendations for practice address the needs of first and second year students from a retention perspective:

1. Design effective peer mentoring programs for first-year students that involved hiring upperclass mentors, preferably in the student's major. These mentoring programs need to be established immediately upon the students' arrival to campus and maintain weekly contact with them, particularly through the critical first six weeks of the semester.

2. Develop partnerships with high school counselors that addressed social readiness factors of college. Students need to have an understanding of how to manage conflict as well as the resources that are available on campus. Many of these resources are new to students.

3. Create peer leadership program within the residence halls. Many schools have moved to suite-style living arrangements. At one of the institutions in the current study, peer leaders were assigned to each suite within the residence halls. These peer leaders acted as liaisons with the students in case there were adjustment issues with roommates or in the college environment. Additionally, if students were not comfortable talking with their peer leader, professional counselors were also available on campus.

4. Conduct focus groups to compare student needs to services currently being provided to see if those services are meeting the needs of the students. By doing so, current programs can be evaluated to determine if they are being effective.

5. Evaluate and examine the effectiveness of first- and second-year programming within the residence halls and leadership programs. Institutions should consider hiring an outside consultant to evaluate how well these programs address students' social readiness factors for college.

6. Deepen the involvement of parents in the first and second year. Many institutions have an office for parent relations but often focused only on first-year students. This office could serve to become a support service for parents and offer resources for helping parents and students adjust to their first- and second-year of college.

7. Increase the use of technology to communicate with students and offer those opportunities in general access labs. Students in the current study discussed the use of technology like Skype, email, Facebook or text message as ways to communicate with loved ones. Higher education administrators could offer these technological advances within the residence halls and general access computer labs.

8. Expand career development programs to include first- and second-year students. As part of the revised career development programs, first-year students would be mandated to take a career inventory upon entry into the university. Based on the results of the inventory, students would have a description of the ideal career paths based on their interests and strengths.

For Research

Based on the findings of the current study with first-and second-year undergraduates students, there were a number of recommendations for future research:

1. Involvement of more institutions. The current study utilized four institution types, mostly located in the southern and Midwest United States. Future studies could include institutions from different regions of the country as well as comparing urban versus rural institution types. Additional studies could also examine differences in the types of social support based on public-private institutional type.

2. Involvement of college juniors and seniors as well as recent graduates from high school with a focus on the period between high school and first year of college. The current study included only first- and second-year students so the social readiness factors could be extended to exploring the same factors in college juniors and seniors as well as those recent high school graduates in the summer before they enter college. By doing so, significant findings could prove to provide a better picture of the social readiness factors of all undergraduate students.
3. Study the social readiness factors of non-traditional, international and underrepresented student populations. This study did not focus on those populations and although the study did involve some underrepresented students, future studies could examine the experiences of underrepresented students, international and non-traditional students. Each of these populations carries with it a variety of experiences that would differ from the students in the current study. Additionally, the results of the study would have differed had there been more diversity in the students that participated in the study.
4. Utilize existing data sets to compare transition points and institution types. Many data sets existed involving first- and second-year students. These data sets could be used to examine social readiness factors for different institution types and student populations. Future research could also involved examining the key transition points for students, such as the period between high school and college or the period after their first year and before the fall semester of their sophomore year as examples.

5. Conduct research with students who are not as involved in college. The study involved students who were moderately involved in leadership activities. Additionally, the students in the current study were recruited by the Dean of Students or Vice-Chancellor of Student Affairs offices on their respective campuses. The students recruited in the study were more involved on campus. Therefore, conducting a future study of students who are not as involved could prove to share additional social readiness factors about this population of students that did not appear in this study.
6. Perform a study with students who had parents that were not college-educated. Many of the students in the current study had parents who attended college so the majority of these students had parents who were college-educated. A study that involved students with parents that were non-college educated could have a significant impact on the results of the study.
7. Examine students who are academically at-risk of dropping out of college. The current study involved students who were academically sound in their respective institutions. For example, many of them had college cumulative grade point averages above a 2.75 and were moderately involved in extracurricular activities on campus. Future studies could examine students with lower grade point averages to see if social readiness factors played a role in their adjustment to college life.
8. Develop informal programming and networking opportunities for first- and second-year students within the residence halls and academic majors. Keup (2007) suggested to “maximize the impact of the community that seems to form

naturally around residence halls, courses, and majors” (p. 26) versus administrators developing formal organizations for students. For example, administrators could host an informal social at the beginning of the school year for students in certain majors within the residence halls. By doing so, students create their own sense of community and develop social networks around shared interests.

Discussion

Relationship to Literature

The results of the current study supported the need for continued research on the relationship of nonacademic factors such as parental and peer support, precollege characteristics and involvement in student activities on campus contributed to students’ socialization to college. By examining these factors in concert with academic factors, college administrators should be able to develop more effective interventions that could improve retention and graduation rates. A study by Larose, Robertson, Roy, and Legault (1998) supported the need to examine how nonintellectual factors can be used as predictors of college success. Specifically, “their capacity to adapt to their new college environment, their personal motivation and involvement regarding learning, and their relationships with their peers and faculty members” (p. 278) was key in understanding how college students succeed from a social readiness standpoint.

The current study also supported the role of cultural norms on college campuses. The students in the current study were introduced to the college campus through their informal and formal interactions with their peer groups as well as with faculty, staff and student organizations. Other studies such as Christie and Dunham (1991) identified the

patterns that existed influencing students' social integration to college. The current study supported the influence of both external influences such as parents and high school friends having an effect on the students in the study as well as institutional influences such as living on campus and involvement in student activities having an influence on the students in the current study.

Finally, the current study supported the idea that students be academically prepared to attend college. For example, the students in the current study all had high school grade point averages above 3.25, indicating a high level of academic preparation. The literature supported the need for high school students to be exposed to challenging course work while still in high school in order to be better prepared for college coursework (Oldham, 2006). Researchers also found that students tended to stay in college if they were involved in campus activities (Fischer, 2007; Pascarella, 2006; Reynolds & Weigand, 2010; Tinto, 1993). The current study supported this notion because all of the students in the current study were involved on campus and had plans on completing their bachelor's degrees as well as furthering their education in graduate school.

Personal Observations

The impetus for conducting the current study evolved over a period of time and in multiple discussions with my dissertation advisor. In the end, we both realized that a study that involved the experiences of undergraduate students needed to be at the forefront of my research. In all of my work in higher education, the student experience has always and will continue to be at the core of the work that I do in higher education. Therefore, having a better understanding of the student experience from multiple lenses

was something that I was deeply interested in learning more about and seemed to be the ideal topic to spend a significant time researching, writing, and contemplating.

During the data collection, I found myself very moved by the students' experiences. The experiences were so varied, in part by the institution types but also the region of the country. One first-year student was heavily involved on campus and casually shared during the focus group interview that her father had passed just a few weeks prior to the meeting. Her half-sister was also a student at the same institution, so having family close as well as being involved helped her in her grieving process.

The students' opinions, particularly the reactions of students at the smaller schools, was interesting. For example, there was a constant comparison to institutions that were larger than their school. Their comments were mostly directed toward students attending large public state colleges and the fact they perceived that those students partied more and had professors who cared less for their academic success. I was also surprised at the perceptions of male and female relationships at four-year private religious institutions. It was mentioned a number of times that unless a female wanted to be perceived as being in a relationship that led to marriage, it was discouraged for them to have male friends. This was a hard concept for some of the women in the study to comprehend because many of them attended public high schools and had many platonic relationships with other males. Attending a smaller private college now limited their relationships with the opposite sex. In comparison, this was not an issue for the students at the larger, four-year public institutions. For these students, adjusting to the rigors of college life and balancing interpersonal relationships in such a large context was a challenge.

The entire process helped me to think more critically about the work I do with first-and second-year students. For example, being even more in tune with their individual experiences and finding ways to help them manage their interpersonal relationships is something that we, as higher education administrators, do not do enough of in this day and time. We tend to focus on the bigger picture of helping them adjust to the campus through academic and student support services. We offer them leadership opportunities from the very first moment they arrive on campus when what these students really need is a class on how to manage the day-to-day rigors of being in college and away from family for the first time in their lives. Further, this generation of students need help managing their personal relationships. If we do not teach them to manage those, then the support we give on the other side will be of no use to them because they will be too busy trying to figure out why their roommate situation is not working out or why they can no longer have male friends. Additionally, this generation of students were in need of administrators who understood their need to maintain constant contact with their family and friends back home. In general access computer labs on campus, students could be provided with a free Skype account and monitored web camera to be able to contact friends and family. This service could also be provided in the residence halls on a limited basis. I am certainly not advocating for more 'hand-holding' but for a deeper understanding that these students are not the same students that entered our campuses 15 years ago. They are more technologically savvy and have different expectations of what college should be for their own personal needs. If we want these students to succeed in higher education, we need to meet them where they are instead of continuing to do things the way we think they should be done.

Chapter Summary

Understanding the experiences of undergraduate college students from a social readiness perspective was key to developing effective retention and transition programs to help these students succeed. In the current study, a number of social readiness factors were identified that played a role in the students' perceptions of their college experience. Factors such as extracurricular activities in high school, Advanced Placement and concurrent enrollment classes as well as the influence of parents and family were all significant influences on students' expectations of college. Additionally, developing a strong social network in college that involved trust and friendship was essential to many of the students in the current study.

The researcher offered recommendations for practice for higher education administrators as well as recommendations for research for those interested in further study on social readiness factors in college. These recommendations included creating peer mentoring programs for first- and second-year students. Recommendations for research included involving more institution types and student populations. In summary, by having a better understanding of the factors that contribute to the students' collegiate experience based on their expectations and experiences, administrators and faculty alike will be able to better develop policy and initiatives that will contribute to students' eventual success, satisfaction, and graduation from our institutions.

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Appendix A
Guide of Questions for Focus Group Sessions
Student Focus Group Questions

Appendix A

Guide of Questions for Focus Group Sessions

Student Focus Group Questions

1. What kinds of experiences have you had that prepared you for college life?
2. How did these experiences shape your current college experience? Are they different or the same as what you expected college to be like?
3. What kinds of things do you do to make sure you stay in college?
4. In what ways did your parents, friends or others support you when you first arrived at the university? (for sophomores) In your second year?
5. In your opinion, what could they have done differently?
6. What is the hardest thing you've had to deal with in college?
7. What did you do to successfully (or not) transition to your first year of college?
Your second year of college?
8. Do you know where to go for help on campus when you need something?
9. Is there anything else that you would like to add that you did not already mention in previous responses?

Appendix B
Student Information Sheet

Appendix B

Student Information Sheet

Institution _____ Classification _____

Major _____

Anticipated graduation date/year _____

Do you live on or off campus? ON OFF

Gender (circle one) M F High school GPA _____

Ethnicity _____

If Multiracial, indicate racial groups: _____

What is your mother's highest level of education? _____

What is your father's highest level of education? _____

Appendix C
IRB Approval



120 Ozark Hall • Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701 • (479) 575-2208 • (479) 575-3846 (FAX)
Email: irb@uark.edu

**Research Support and Sponsored Programs
Institutional Review Board**

October 7, 2010

MEMORANDUM

TO: MaryJane Secuban
Michael Miller

FROM: Ro Windwalker
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 10-09-119

Protocol Title: *From High School to College: Factors Shaping the Collegiate Experience*

Review Type: EXEMPT EXPEDITED FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 10/07/2010 Expiration Date: 10/06/2011

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Compliance website (<http://www.uark.edu/admin/rsspinfo/compliance/index.html>). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 120 Ozark Hall, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

Appendix D

Request for participation for Dean of Students and/or Vice-President of
Student Affairs office

Appendix D

Request for participation for Dean of Students and/or Vice-President of Student Affairs office

(Date)

(Name of Contact)

Dear (Name of Contact):

As part of research for the doctoral of education degree in the College of Education and Health Professions at the University of Arkansas, I am interested in conducting focus groups with first and second year students at the University of Arkansas. The title of my dissertation is FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE: FACTORS SHAPING THE COLLEGIATE EXPERIENCE. The purpose for conducting this study will be to develop an understanding of undergraduate college students' social readiness for the collegiate experience. Specifically, the study will explore the role that socialization plays in a student's transition from high school to college. Students will be asked to participate in an hour-long focus group with peers in a discussion of their perceptions of how these factors impact their experience on campus. Participation in the research is completely voluntary. There are no payments involved for participating.

Confidentiality: All information will be recorded anonymously. Student names will not be associated with the responses. All information will be held in the strictest of confidence.

Right to Withdraw: Participants have the right to refuse to participate in the research at any time. If students choose to withdraw from this study, the researcher will be notified during the study. Their decision to withdraw will bring no negative consequences or penalty.

I am inviting your assistance in this project by asking that your office identify the names and contact information of six (6) to eight (8) first and second year traditional undergraduate students based on the following criteria:

- first-year or second year traditional undergraduate students,
- moderately involved in campus activities (defined as holding an office in a student organization and/or involved in 2-3 student organizations),
- unmarried and with no children,
- academically eligible to participate in campus student organizations as defined by the Student Activities office of the U of A.

The sessions with students will be conducted during late October 2010 so I would appreciate a response from you on or before September 30, 2010. I appreciate your assistance in this endeavor.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Gigi Secuban
Higher Education, Ed.D Candidate

Appendix E

Letter of confirmation from Dean of Students/ Vice President of Student Affairs office



UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

Office of the Vice Provost for Student Affairs/Dean of Students

September 23, 2010

Mary Jane (Gigi) Secuban

Fayetteville AR 72701

Dear Ms. Secuban:

Thank you for your interest in continued research regarding first and second year students. Your dissertation involving the exploration of undergraduate college students' social readiness for the collegiate experience is a topic that will expand our knowledge and policy making decisions regarding this population of students. On behalf of the Dean of Students office at the University of Arkansas, we are willing to assist you in your research with our students and give you permission to meet with students for the purposes of this research.

Based on the criteria outlined in your letter, our office will provide the names and email addresses of six to eight first and second year undergraduate students. This information will be provided in a separate email to you.

We wish you much success in the pursuit of your graduate education. Please let us know if you need more information. We look forward to the results of your research.

Sincerely,

Daniel J. Pugh, Sr., Ph.D.
Vice Provost for Student Affairs/Dean of Students

Appendix F

Follow-up Email to Verify Participants and Date of Focus Group

Appendix F

Follow-up Email to Verify Participants and Date of Focus Group

(Date)

Dear (Name of Participant):

Thank you for your willingness to participate in a one-hour long focus group session to discuss your college experience as a student at (name of institution). The session is scheduled for (date) at (time) at the following location in your city: _____. Light snacks will be provided. If you are able to attend, please respond to me no later than (date) by 5pm so that I may reserve your space in this session.

If you have questions, please contact me at 479.575.3625 or gsecuban@uark.edu or my dissertation advisor, Dr. Michael Miller at 479.575.3582 or mtmille@uark.edu.

Thanks for your time,

MaryJane (Gigi) Secuban

Higher Education, Ed.D. Candidate

Appendix G
Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT

Title: FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE: FACTORS SHAPING THE COLLEGIATE EXPERIENCE

Researcher(s):

Mary Jane (Gigi) Secuban, M.S.,
Graduate student,
gsecuban@uark.edu, 575.3625
Michael T. Miller, Ed.D., Faculty
Advisor, 575-3582,
mtmille@uark.edu

106 Graduate Education Building
Fayetteville, AR 72701
479.575.4758

Administrator(s):

Rosemary Ruff, Director
Research and Sponsored
Programs

Programs:

University of Arkansas
College of Education and Health
Professions
Department of Rehabilitation,
Human Resources and
Communication Disorders

Research Compliance
University of Arkansas
120 Ozark Hall
Fayetteville, AR 72701
479.575.3845
rruff@uark.edu

Description: The purpose for conducting this study will be to develop an understanding of undergraduate college students' social readiness for the collegiate experience. Specifically, the study explored the role that socialization plays in a student's transition from high school to college. You will be asked to participate in a 45-minute focus group with your peers in a discussion of your perceptions of how these factors impact your experience on campus.

Risk and Benefits: The benefits include contributing to the knowledge base of the factors surrounding students' socialization to college as well as retention and transition issues associated with first and second year undergraduate students. There are no anticipated risks to participating in this study.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the research is completely voluntary. There are no payments involved for participating.

Confidentiality: All information will be recorded anonymously. Your name will not be associated with your responses. All information will be held in the strictest of confidence.

Right to Withdraw: You have the right to refuse to participate in the research at any time. If you would like to withdraw from this study, simply inform the researcher at any time. Your decision to withdraw will bring no negative consequences or penalty to you.

Informed Consent: I, _____, have read the description, including the purpose of the study, the procedures to be used, the potential risks and side effects, the confidentiality, as well as the option to withdraw from the study at any time. Each of these items have been explained to me in detail by the investigator. The investigator has adequately answered my questions in regard to this study and I understand what is involved by agreeing to participate. My signature below indicates that I freely agree to participate in this exploratory study and have received a copy of this agreement from the investigator.

Signature

Date